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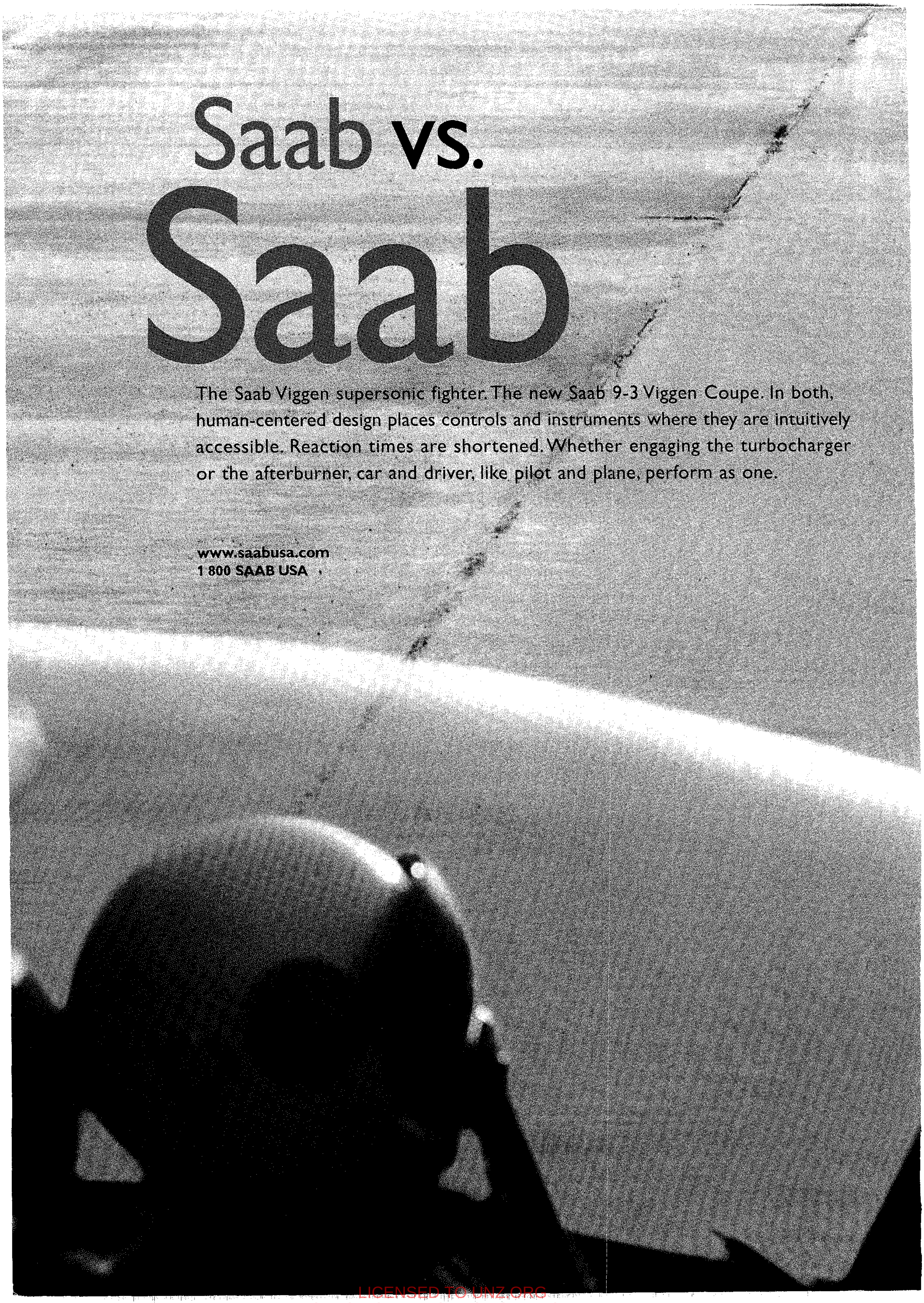

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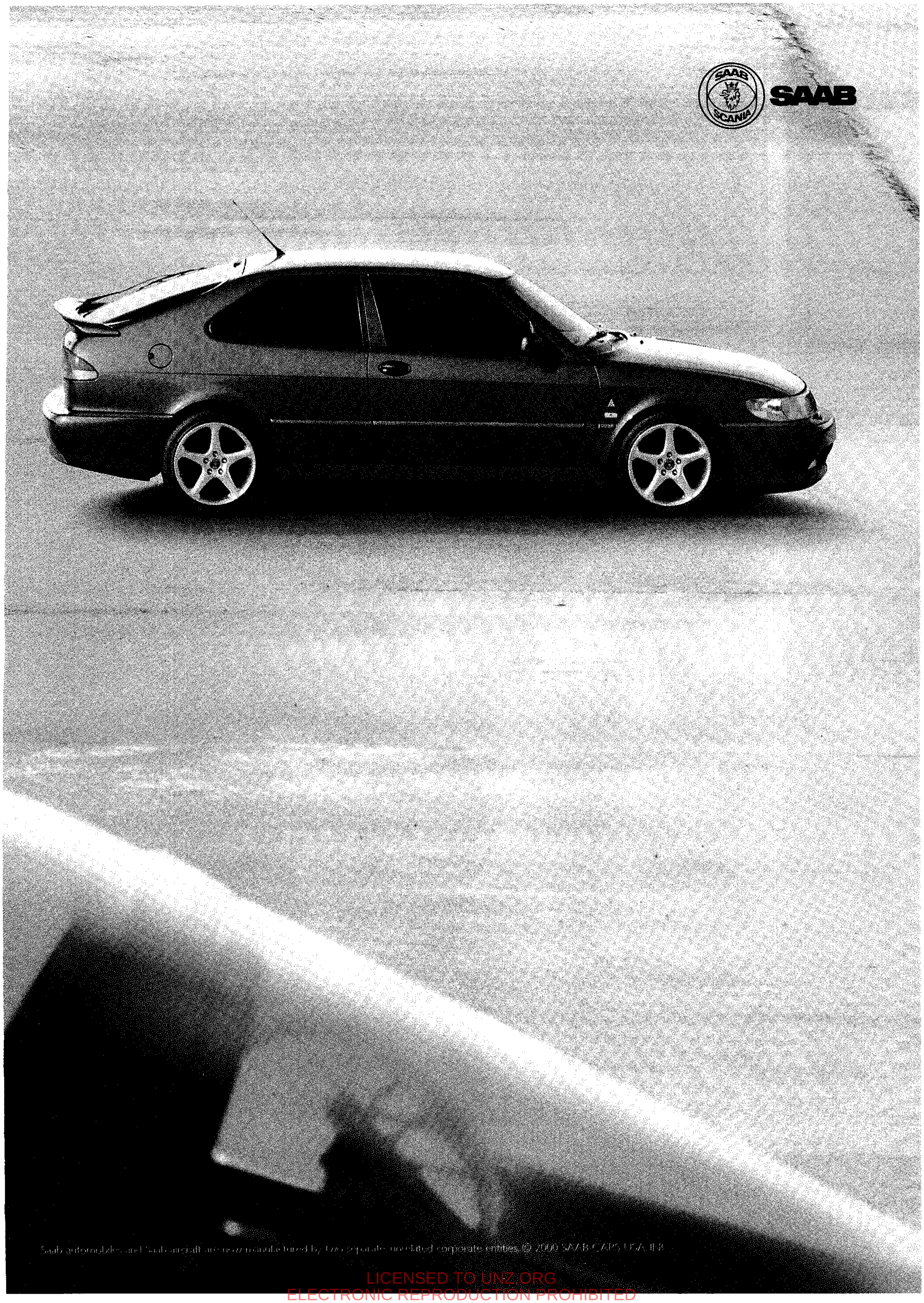

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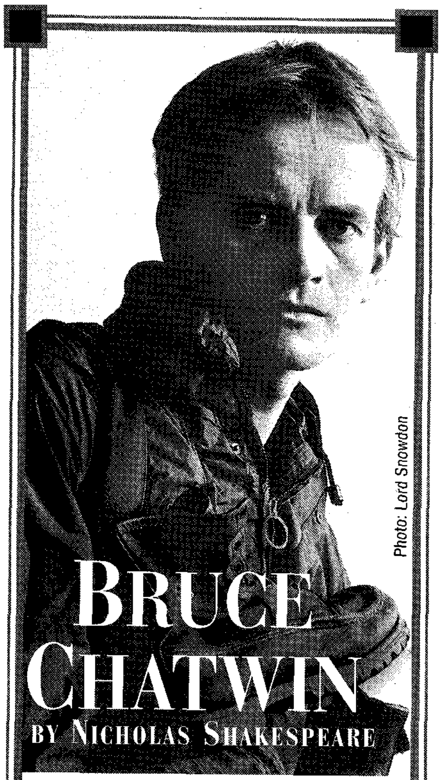

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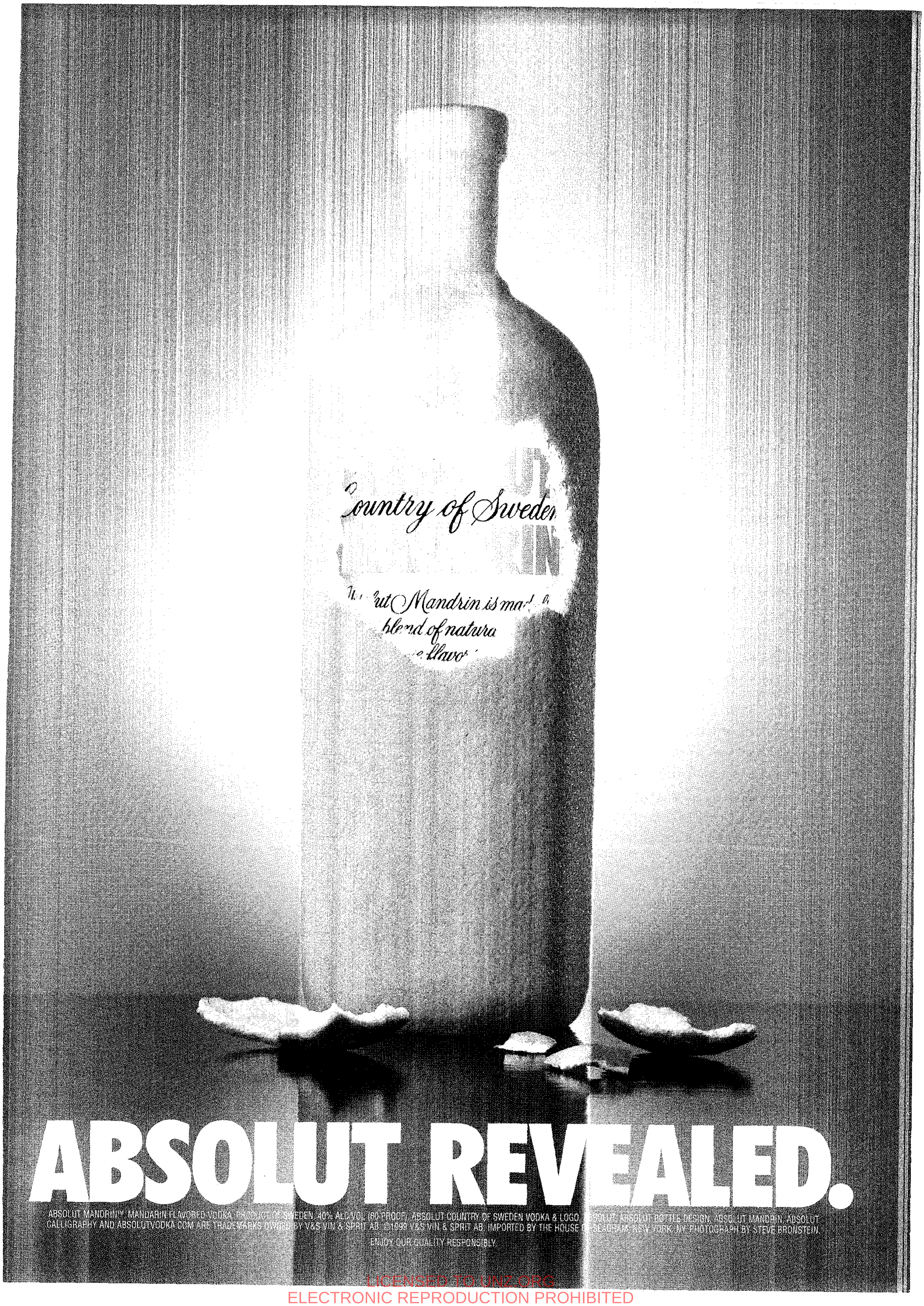

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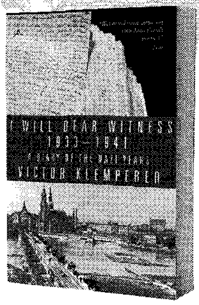

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ted Conover ("Guarding Sing Sing," p. 54) is the author of "Whiteout" and "Coyotes." A book about his experiences as a correction officer, "Newjack," will be published by Random House in May.

Julian Barnes (The Talk of the Town, p. 29) has written eight novels, including, most recently, "England, England."

John Seabrook ("Selling the Weather," p. 44) is a *New Yorker* staff writer. His new book is "Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing—The Marketing of Culture."

Edward Gorey (The Back Page, p. 102) is an author and artist. His latest book, "The Headless Bust," is the second in a planned trilogy.

John Updike (Books, p. 89) is the author of fifty-one books, including, most recently, "More Matter" and the novel "Gertrude and Claudius."

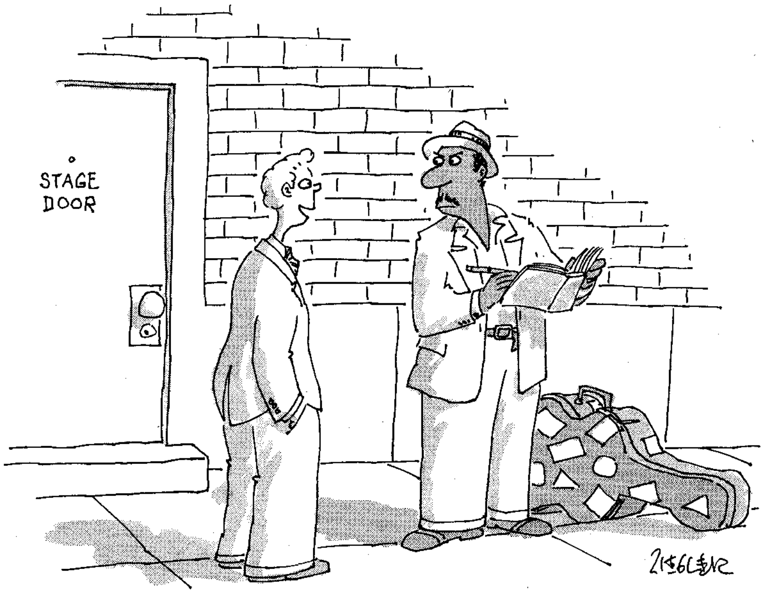
James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 32) will be writing about business affairs each week. His articles have appeared in *Fortune* and *Slate*, among other publications.

Larissa MacFarquhar ("Caesar.com," p. 34) is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*.

Nicholas Lemann (Comment, p. 27), a *New Yorker* staff writer, is the author of "The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy."

George Saunders (Fiction, p. 68) has two books coming out this year: "Pastoralia," a collection of short stories, and "The Very Persistent Gappers of Frip," a fable, illustrated by Lane Smith.

John Hersey (Takes, p. 73) contributed to *The New Yorker* for forty-four years. In 1946, the magazine devoted an entire issue to his article "Hiroshima." ♦



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THE MAIL

RATING TIPPER

Elsa Walsh's Profile of Tipper Gore ("After Hillary," March 6th) seemed oblivious of the possibility that Gore's record on media labelling and parents' rights might actually help her husband in the general election. As a young slacker during the eighties, I recall mocking her efforts along with Frank Zappa and everyone else. As a parent these days, I'm quite thankful for the heads-up that labelling gives me when I'm shopping for CDs for my two young sons. Facing an election that will certainly hinge in part on questions of personal morality and responsibility, I find it inconceivable that Tipper Gore's record won't protect her husband's right flank.

Tim Collie
Boca Raton, Fla.

Ms. Walsh accepts too uncritically Mrs. Gore's protestation that she and her colleagues in the Parents Music Resource Center were interested not in suppressing music that displeased them, but only in establishing a rating system that would warn parents about what their children were buying. Deciding which songs to brand with pejorative ratings; discerning the meaning of often ambiguous lyrics; discriminating against the art that speaks to youth (after all, few people seriously considered labelling opera, despite its heavy doses of sex and violence)—all these problems make music-rating systems much more than a source of benign information. With the Vice-President an avid promoter of Internet rating and blocking schemes, which are even more problematic, the Gores are a potential First Couple whose commitment to artistic and intellectual freedom should be questioned.

Marjorie Heins
New York City

ESSAYING FICTION

In "The Hunger Artist" (March 6th), Joan Acocella suggests that we can, for the purposes of discussion, divide Susan Sontag's career into an essay period and a novel period. However, we might arrive at a better understanding of her art if we blur rather than highlight the distinction between the two forms, as writers including Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, and Elias Canetti have done. In Robert Musil's novel "The Man Without Qualities," for instance, Musil could have been describing Sontag's sensibility as well as his character Ulrich's when he wrote that "it was more or less in the way an essay, in the sequence of its paragraphs, explores a thing from many sides without wholly encompassing it—for a thing wholly encompassed suddenly loses its scope and melts down to a concept—that he believed he could most rightly survey and handle the world and his own life."

Benjamin Sloan
Lillington, N.C.

THE PILL AND THE POPE

Malcolm Gladwell, in "John Rock's Error" (March 13th), claims that John Rock's research on the birth-control pill and his promotion of it as "natural" were heavily biased by his desire to appease the theological stance of the Catholic Church—that "in John Rock's mind the dictates of religion and the principles of science got mixed up." But Rock should be commended: he used the best data available at the time he developed the Pill to determine what seemed the most natural and, presumably, healthy regulation of ovulation and menstruation. It does not take loyalty to the Pope to make minimizing a drug's interference in a natural process seem wise and in the best interests of women's health.

James Matthew Wilson
Amherst, Mass.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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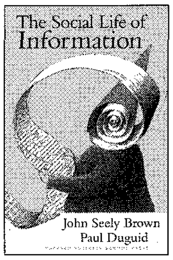

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The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

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ANIMAL MAGNETISM
Mabou Mines' latest work, a "live cartoon in animal drag," written by Terry O'Reilly, about a monkey and a rhino involved in a star-crossed love affair. Previews begin March 31. (St. Ann's Church, 157 Montague St., Brooklyn. 718-858-2424.)

BETWIXT
The heretofore solo artist David Cale's first duet, co-starring Cara Seymour, is a collection of portraits of English expatriates in America. Preview on March 29. Opens March 30 at 8. (St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's drama, which was inspired by a meeting in 1941 between the German physicist Werner Heisenberg and his Dutch counterpart Niels Bohr. Michael Blakemore is the director. In previews. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE GREEN BIRD
The director Julie Taymor brings Carlo Gozzi's fairy tale to the stage with puppets, masks, and live performers. The music is by Elliot Goldenthal. Previews begin April 1. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1971 musical, based on the last days in the life of you know who. Gale Edwards is the director. In previews. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

NAKED
A new translation of the Pirandello play, starring Mira Sorvino and Daniel Benzali and directed by John Rando. Previews begin March 30. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 677-4210.)

NOEL COWARD'S SUITE IN 2 KEYS
Two of the playwright's last works, "Shadows of the Evening" and "A Song at Twilight," performed by Hayley Mills, Judith Ivey, and Paxton Whitehead and directed by John Tillinger. In previews. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

THE REAL THING
From London, a Donmar Warehouse staging of Tom Stoppard's 1984 play, directed by David Leveaux. In previews. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RIDE DOWN MT. MORGAN
Patrick Stewart portrays a bigamist in Arthur Miller's play. David Esbjornson is the director. In previews. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

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ROSE
Olympia Dukakis has the title role in a new play by Martin Sherman, which traces a Jewish woman's life, from her childhood in Russia to the Warsaw ghettos to Miami Beach. Nancy Meckler is the director. In previews. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

TALLER THAN A DWARF
From the pen of Elaine May, a new comedy starring Matthew Broderick and Parker Posey and directed by Alan Arkin. In previews. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE WILD PARTY
Joseph Moncure March's Jazz Age poem is the basis for Michael John LaChiusa and George C. Wolfe's new musical, starring Mandy Patinkin, Eartha Kitt, and Toni Collette. With music by Mr. LaChiusa. Mr. Wolfe is the director. In previews. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AIDA
A musical based on the Verdi opera. With music by Elton John, lyrics by Tim Rice, and a book by Linda Woolverton and David Henry Hwang. Robert Falls is the director. (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

THE ALTRUISTS
Nicky Silver's new comedy, starring Veanne Cox and Sam Robards. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/20/00.) (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 353-0303. Closes April 1.)

AMADEUS
From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

AMERICAN BUFFALO
An Atlantic Theatre Company staging of David Mamet's 1975 play. (3/27/00) (336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

ARMS AND THE MAN
A Roundabout Theatre production of Shaw's 1894 play, under the direction of Roger Rees. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

BAD BOY NIETZSCHE
Richard Foreman's latest play, an examination of intellectual accountability and a philosopher's slide into madness. Gary Wilmes is wonderful as Nietzsche, who here seems incapable of being truly bad, despite the provocations of a Cruel Man, a Child, and a Beautiful Woman; they test his authenticity by brutally beating a stuffed calico horse (at the beginning of Nietzsche's actual breakdown, he collapsed on a Turin street at the sight of a horse being flogged), taunting him ("Nobody reads the stuff you read"), and corrupting his ideas with willful malapropisms (Nietzsche bakes a loaf of bread filled with jewels, which the Beautiful Woman insists is filled with Jews). Philosophical ruminations degrade into insanity, and the shaky, accident-prone Nietzsche staggers toward his finish. It's a smart play with a big payoff and, like all of Foreman's work, is the sort of thing that sticks in the brain in the best possible way. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

BIRDSEED BUNDLES
Lola Pashalinski and Valda Setterfield are in the cast of Ain Gordon's latest play. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Closes April 2.)

THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS
In this exuberant take on "The Comedy of Errors," the action has been shifted to a hip-hop realm, and the basic ideas remain the same, but the four extravagantly talented writer-actors (who play all of the parts) make it seem altogether new. (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

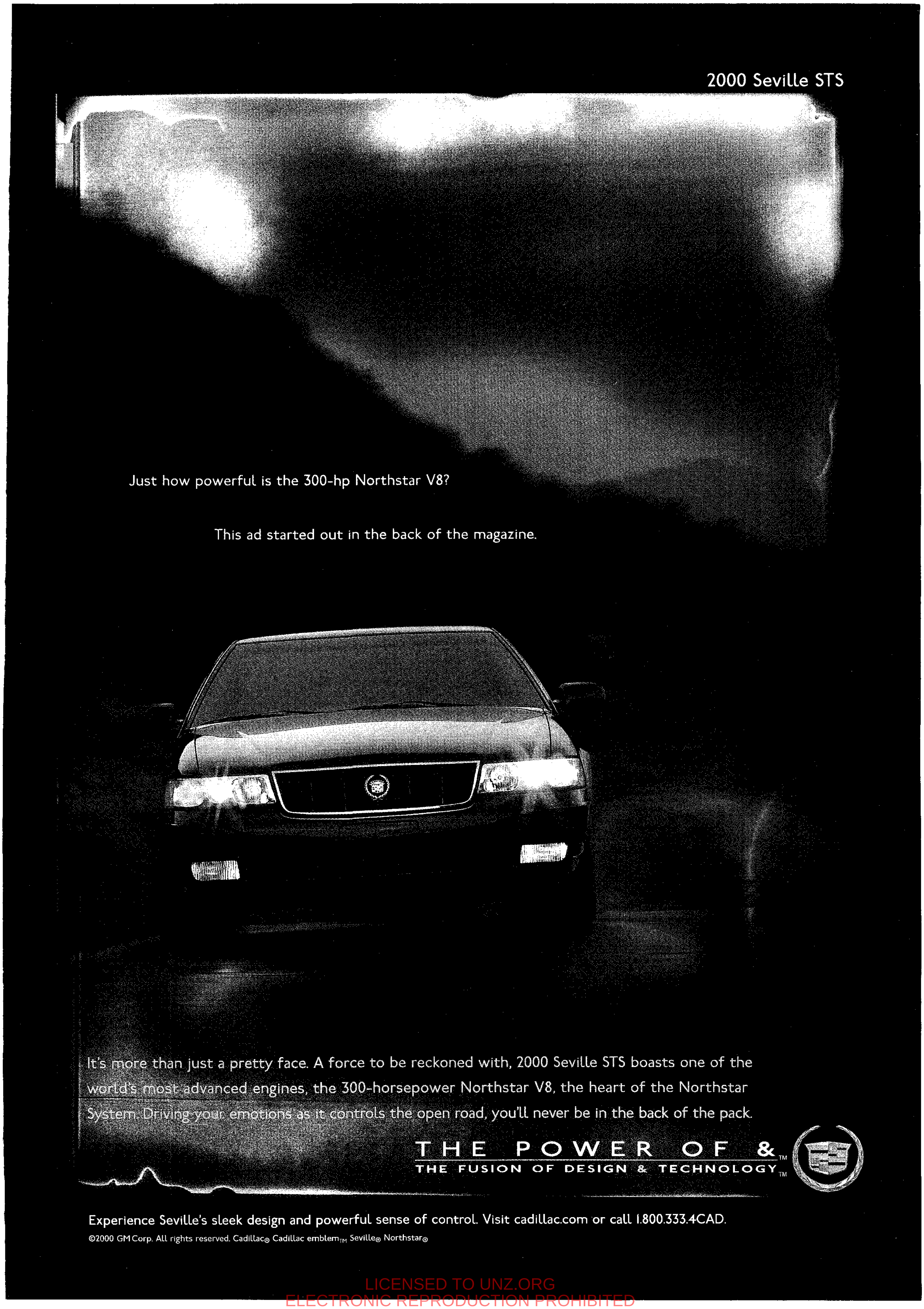
CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (10/18-25/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

THE COUNTRY BOY
A young Irishman returns home after fifteen years in America, in a drama by John Murphy. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes April 2.)

DAME EDNA: THE ROYAL TOUR
Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (11/1/99) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Donald Margulies's new play is a perceptive depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

THE DIRECTOR
Through the character of a theatre director who tries to find truth by playing abusive mind games



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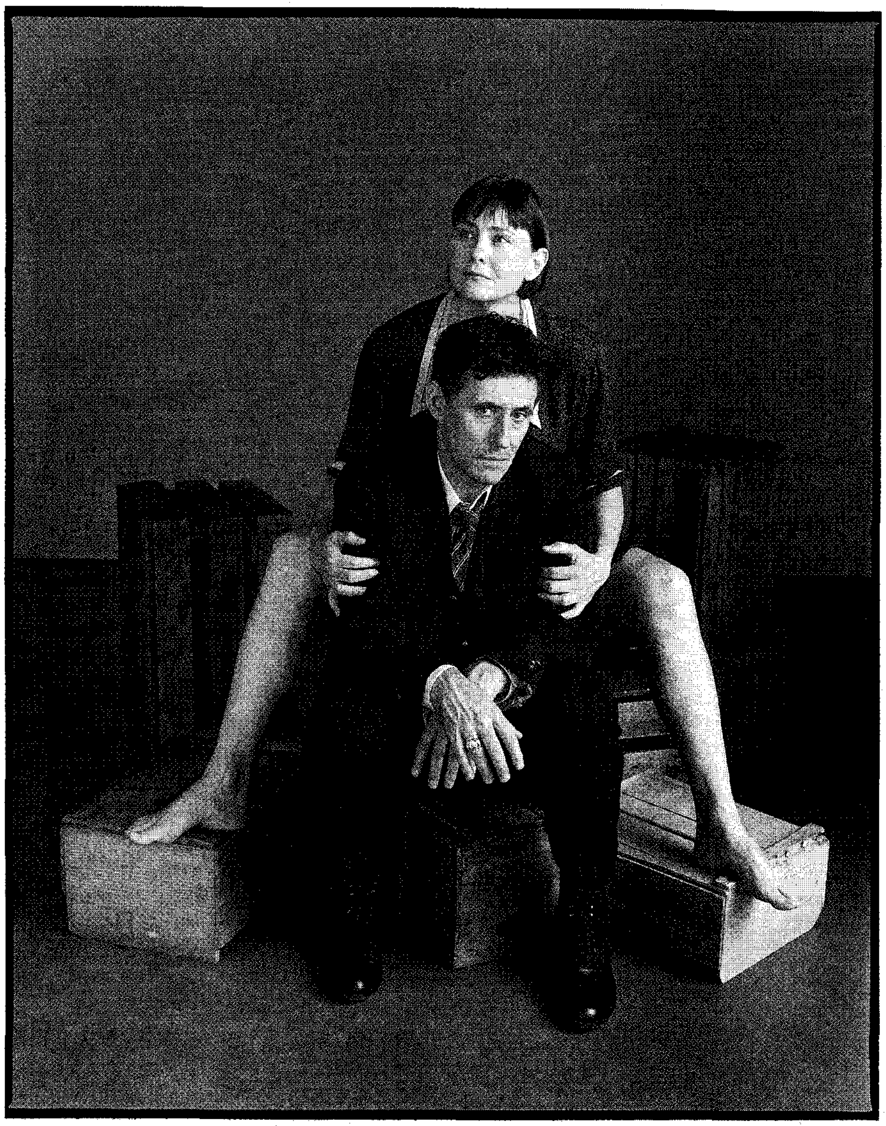

Gabriel Byrne and Cherry Jones, in "A Moon for the Misbegotten."

MARY ELLEN MARK

with everyone he knows, the playwright Nancy Hasty asks whether acting (which is essentially lying) can reveal deeper truth. It's a smart play, and, though it's not entirely satisfying intellectually, John Shea's brilliant performance as the director almost makes it seem so. (Arclight, 152 W. 71st St. 279-4200.)

DOWN THE DRAIN
The Adobe Theatre Company's latest offering is a dark comedy by Stanton Wood, about a woman who kills her children and reports them kidnapped. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 532-8887.)

ENOUGH ABOUT ME: AN UNAUTHORIZED BIOGRAPHY OF VARLA JEAN MERMAN
The alleged love child of Ernest Borgnine and Ethel Merman shares songs and stories from her painful life. (Chelsea Playhouse, 125 W. 22nd St. 307-4100.)

FUDDY MEERS
There is such a thing as inspired nonsense, but don't look for it in David Lindsay-Abaire's comedy, which is an exemplar of expired nonsense. The play relies heavily on handicap humor: one of the characters is blind in one eye, and has a limp, a lisp, and an ear that's a "twisted mass of burnt scar tissue"; another has garbled speech as a result of a stroke; another is—ha ha ha—dyslexic. The excellent cast, featuring J. Smith-Cameron, Robert Stanton, John Christopher Jones, and Patrick Breen, makes the most of what cleverness the play does contain; nonetheless, you may leave the theatre with the feeling that you just attended a Helen Keller-joke marathon. (3/6/00) (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 307-4100.)

THE HOLOGRAM THEORY
The ghost of a woman's twin enlists her to solve his murder, in a drama by Jessica Goldberg. (McGinn Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200. Closes April 9.)

HOUSE ARREST
In her latest one-woman show, Anna Deavere Smith explores the office of the President of the United States. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200. Closes April 9.)

IMPERFECT LOVE
The tightrope between love and ambition is delineated with passion, charm, and wit in this retelling of the story of the great Italian actress Eleonora Duse and her playwright lover Gabriele D'Annunzio (here called Gabrielle Torrisi), written and directed by Brandon Cole. (New York Performance Works, 128 Chambers St. 969-0166. Closes April 16.)

JACKIE MASON: MUCH ADO ABOUT EVERYTHING
The comic is back on Broadway with his latest show. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

JAMES JOYCE'S THE DEAD
Playwrights Horizons' musical version of the short story. (11/8/99) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

KISS ME, KATE
With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
Cherry Jones and Gabriel Byrne star in O'Neill's 1943 drama, under the direction of Daniel Sullivan. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

PEARL THEATRE COMPANY
Presenting Congreve's "The Way of the World." (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians comes to Broadway. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SWING!
A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

THE TALE OF THE ALLERGIST'S WIFE
Charles Busch's new comedy, about an antidote to midlife malaise, stars Linda Lavin, Michele Lee, and Tony Roberts. (3/20/00) (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 16.)

THE TIME OF THE CUCKOO
Arthur Laurents' 1953 play, set in Venice, about a romantically deprived American woman (or spinster, as they called them in the old days) who gets a chance at a vacation affair with an Italian shop owner. It's a lovely production of a dated play, with roundly good acting. The fine actress Debra Munk plays the lead with a chirpy-angry edge ("I love being alone," she tells other guests at her pensione as they depart, by twos, for dinner). Her performance may seem as if it's spinning out of control once the romantic going gets rough, and you find yourself hoping the poor Italian doesn't take her on, but it's an accurate portrait of the character she has chosen to portray: a woman too far gone into lonely desperation to elicit much sympathy, even from herself. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST
Philip Seymour Hoffman and John C. Reilly star in Sam Shepard's 1980 play, under the direction of Matthew Warchus. (3/27/00) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Eve Ensler's one-woman show is now being performed by a rotating three-woman cast. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories are touching and memorable. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

WAITING IN THE WINGS
In the best of Noël Coward's postwar plays, old gallant theatricals duke it out in a retirement home, where they fire off some terrific one-liners. Although the play itself is somewhat creaky, the pros who bring it to life here aren't: Bette Henritze, Elizabeth Wilson, Rosemary Harris, Dana Ivey, and the evergreen Lauren Bacall. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

WASTE
Banned in 1907 because of its controversial content, Harley Granville-Barker's play about a political scandal went unproduced until 1936. Today, despite the efforts of Theatre for a New Audience's fine large cast, a remarkably contemporary take on abortion, and a couple of crackling scenes, the text makes for pretty stodgy going. The humor and humanism displayed in Barker's "The Voysey Inheritance" (recently mounted in town) are overpowered here by the writer's speechy, big-issue dramatic approach. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes April 2.)

THE WAVERLY GALLERY
Eileen Heckart portrays an aging Greenwich Village art dealer who must give up her gallery, in a new play by Kenneth Lonergan. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200. Closes April 15.)

WHAT YOU GET AND WHAT YOU EXPECT
A pair of rival architects compete to design the first monument on the moon, in a satire by the French playwright Jean-Marie Besset, translated by Hal J. Witt. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

THE WILD PARTY
In taking Joseph Moncure March's dark cautionary poem about a group of Prohibition-era profli-

IAN HOLM STANLEY TUCCI

First he wrote Joe's story.
Then he became part of it.

PATRICIA CLARKSON HOPE DAVIS
AND SUSAN SARANDON

JOE GOULD'S SECRET

Every life is a work in progress.

OCTOBER FILMS PRESENTS A FIRST COLD PRESS/CHARLES WEINSTOCK PRODUCTION IAN HOLM STANLEY TUCCI "JOE GOULD'S SECRET" PATRICIA CLARKSON HOPE DAVIS AND SUSAN SARANDON MUSIC SUPERVISOR SUSAN JACOBS MUSIC BY EVAN LURIE COSTUME DESIGNER JULIET POLCSA EDITED BY SUZY ELMIGER PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANDREW JACKNESS DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MARYSE ALBERTI EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MICHAEL LIEBER CHRISANN VERGES PRODUCED BY CHARLES WEINSTOCK ELIZABETH W. ALEXANDER STANLEY TUCCI

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BASED ON "PROFESSOR SEAGULL" AND "JOE GOULD'S SECRET" BY JOSEPH MITCHELL SCREENPLAY BY HOWARD A. RODMAN DIRECTED BY STANLEY TUCCI

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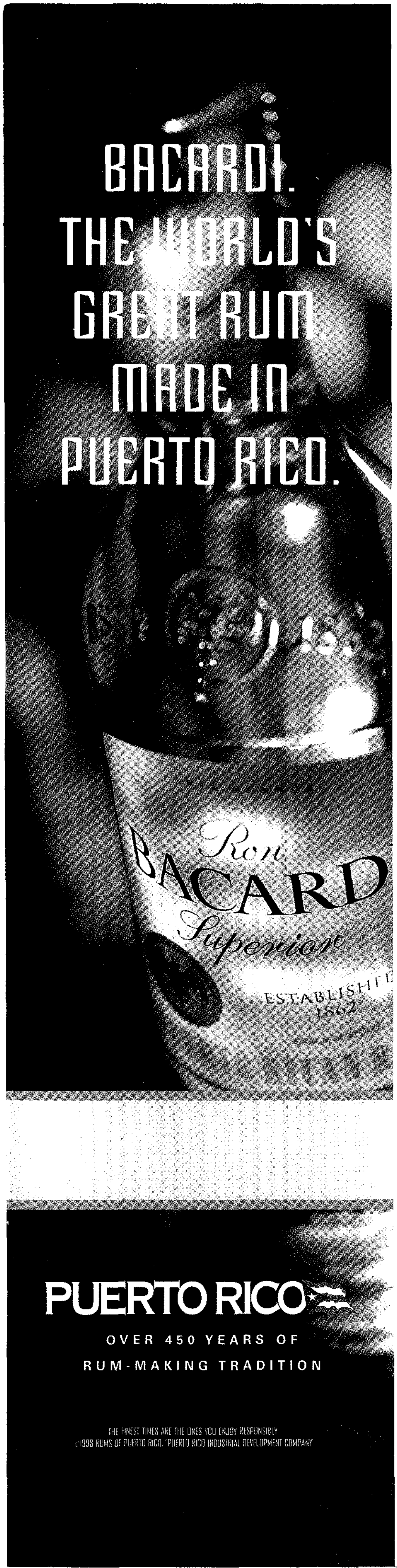
USA FILMS

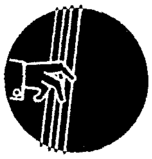
SELECT ENGAGEMENTS START APRIL 7TH



gates and turning it into a musical love story between an angry vaudeville clown and a louche flapper, the composer Andrew Lippa and Manhattan Theatre Club have ended up with a crass, overplayed muddle of mixed intentions and missed opportunities. There's plenty of talent on display—a great set by David Gallo, mostly good costumes, a few fun songs, and, especially, a terrific performance from Brian D'Arcy James, as Burrs the clown. But most of the tunes build to the typical pop-maudlin crescendo that blights contemporary musicals, and they're sung generically, without regard for character. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 9.)

WOYZECK
The German dramatist Georg Büchner died in 1837, before finishing this play about a low-ranking soldier who is driven by poverty and shame to kill his mistress. In their second reinvigoration of a modern classic (last fall they adapted Beckett's "Play"), the Axis Theatre Company juxtaposes silent film (which tells Büchner's own story) with live performance (of the play itself) to create a compellingly unsettling evening. Robert Ierardi's increasingly baffled frustration as Woyzeck gives the play an emotional coherence that it often lacks, and the production, directed by Randy Sharp and Michael Gump, reflects Axis's clear and powerful artistic vision. (One Sheridan Sq., near Seventh Ave. 807-9300. Closes April 1.)

JAZZ NOTES



MIXING IT UP
Jazz has an uncanny way of keeping even its oldest practitioners young at heart, which makes them valuable company for smart, younger musicians.

The thirty-nine-year-old saxophonist Greg Osby, who usually surrounds himself with energetic twenty-something sidemen, turns to two of jazz's most critically acclaimed senior figures—the sixty-two-year-old pianist Andrew Hill and the sixty-nine-year-old guitarist Jim Hall—for his latest release, **"The Invisible Hand"** (Blue Note). Hill and Hall, who both have distinctive, highly introspective styles, give the album a more reflective bent than Osby's frenetic work usually has. Hall's improvisation on "Nature Boy" highlights the daring—and emotionally gripping—asymmetrical phrasing that has come to characterize his playing. Hill, for his part, still hasn't met a phrase he couldn't deconstruct with his carefully stumbling timing and off-kilter harmonies; "The Watcher," his bracing duet with Osby, brings out both Hill's enduring sense of adventure and Osby's ever-growing maturity.

On Hill's forthcoming album, **"Dusk"** (Palmetto), the pianist keeps company with a few of today's most quick-witted players—men who clearly relish his never-say-die iconoclasm. Youthful saxophonists Marty Ehrlich and Greg Tardy and trumpeter Ron Horton, who helped spark Hill's recent resurgence, revel in the weird, shifting time signatures and unpredictable melodies of such Hill compositions as "Ball Square" and "Sept." Hill still has plenty of knowledge to offer, and these improvisers, who grew up on his recordings, obviously enjoy learning from him.

The easy rapport that the eighty-five-year-old tenor saxophonist Flip Phillips establishes with players half a century younger on **"Swing Is the Thing!"** (Verve) proves that the rhythmic vitality that electrified audiences during the Jazz at the Philharmonic extravaganzas, in the nineteen-forties, is far from exhausted. Neither the octogenarian nor his younger bandmates hold anything back, and Phillips's breakneck takes on "Flip the Whip" and "The Mark of Zorro," which find him duking it out with saxophonists James Carter and Joe Lovano, are hair-raising.

—*Steve Futterman*

DANCE

ELIOT FELD'S BALLET TECH
March 29 at 8: "Aurora I," "Cherokee Rose," "Nodrog Doggo," and "Felix: The Ballet." ♦ March 30 at 8: "Consort," "Medium: Rare," "Mending," and "Paper Tiger." ♦ March 31 at 8: "Aurora II," "Cherokee Rose," "Nodrog Doggo," and "Contra Pose." ♦ April 1 at 2: A family matinée. ♦ April 1 at 8: "Aurora I," "Aurora II," and "Mending." ♦ April 2 at noon: A family matinée. ♦ April 2 at 4: "Play Bach," "Medium: Rare," "Tarantella," and "Apple Pie." ♦ April 4 at 8: "Consort," "Kore," "Nodrog Doggo," and "The Jig Is Up." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Through April 23.)

EIFMAN BALLET OF ST. PETERSBURG
During the first week of a three-week engagement, the forty-two-member company, under the direction of Boris Eifman, performs "Russian Hamlet (Son of Catherine the Great)." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. March 29-31 at 8, April 1 at 2 and 8, and April 2 at 2 and 7. Through April 16.)

"THE 'L' WORD"
The choreographer Janis Brenner presents three works: "Heartstrings"; "The Memory of All That," with an expanded cast of dancers whose ages range from nine to seventy; and the title piece (yes, the "L" word is "love"), whose score is divided between works by Bach and Bjork. (92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Project, Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 415-5553. March 28-30 and April 1 at 8 and April 2 at 5.)

RACE DANCE
The choreographer Lisa Race offers three works, including "Defiance, Ohio," an homage of sorts to the small town that Race's parents chose for their hasty wedding site when they eloped fifty-eight years ago. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 30-April 1 at 8:30 and April 2 at 7:30.)

THE MORGAN SCOTT BALLET
The company presents two programs of ballet works choreographed by Edward Morgan, with the assistance of company director Daniel Scott. The selections include "Love, Karen, and the 1970s," set to love songs by the Carpenters, and "L'Air d'Oré." (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. March 30-April 1 at 8 and April 2 at 3.)

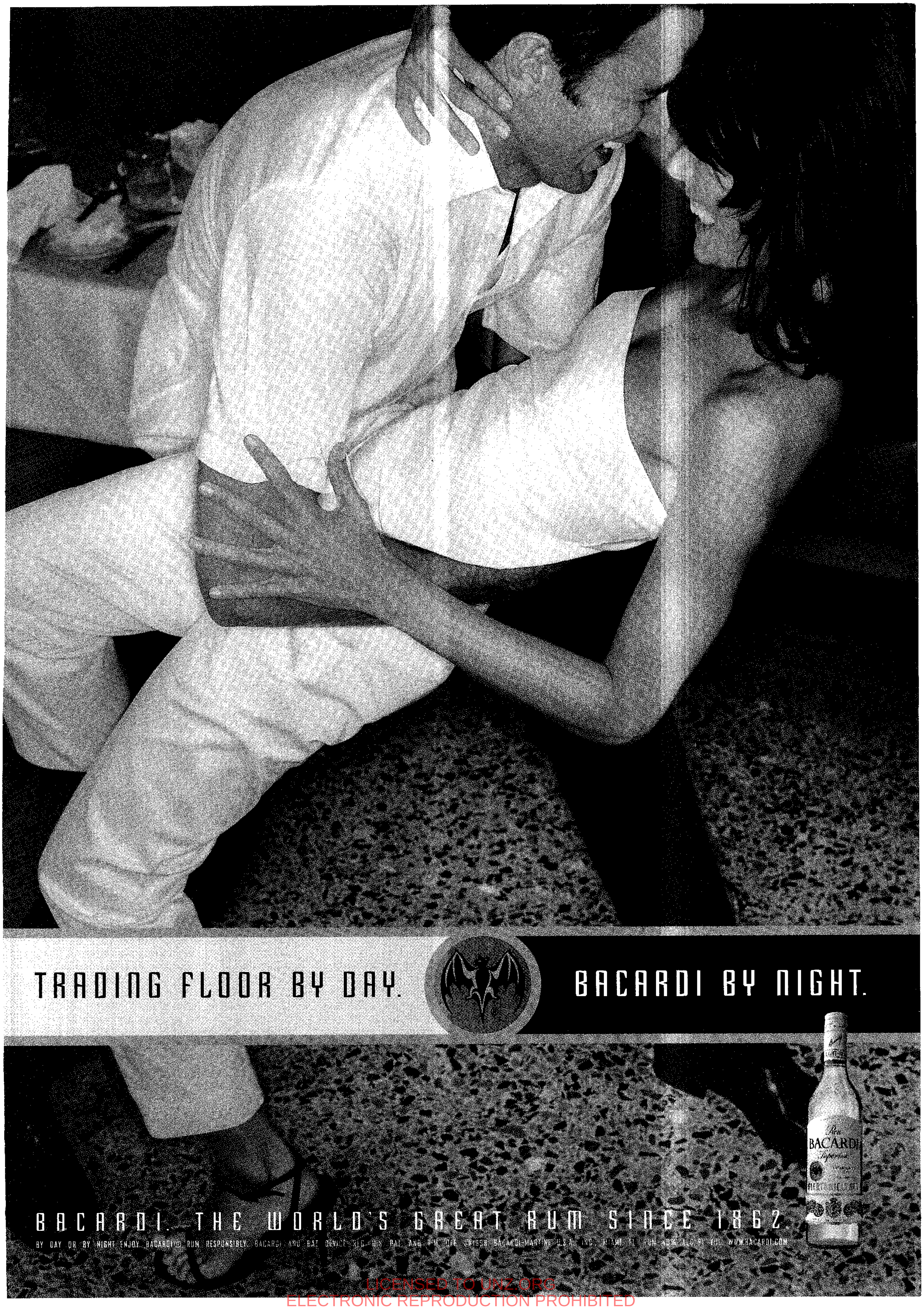
NEO LABOS DANCE THEATRE
The troupe brings two pieces based on artistic sources: "Study for the Presence of a Myth," inspired by the work of Cy Twombly, and "Codex," based on movement studies by Leonardo and Carlo Urbino. (Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 30-April 1 at 8.)

AILEY II
The apprentice company, whose membership represents a sort of dean's list of the Ailey School, crams in eighteen pieces, both premières and repertory works, in four days of performance. (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7148. March 30-31 at 8, April 1 at 2 and 8, and April 2 at 3.)

TRAVEL THEORY
The Hiroshima-born choreographer Yasuko Yokoshi, whose movements draw equally from ballet and martial arts, presents parables of aggression and submission, from the perspective of a trio of young girls. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 30-April 2 at 8:30.)

NIGHT LIFE CONCERTS

"MOODY'S MOODS—JAMES MOODY'S 75TH BIRTHDAY BASH"
Instrumental virtuosos aren't always a serious lot; on saxophone and flute, Moody spins out warped figures and surrealist doodles as easily as he does serpentine bebop lines. A fleet alto saxophonist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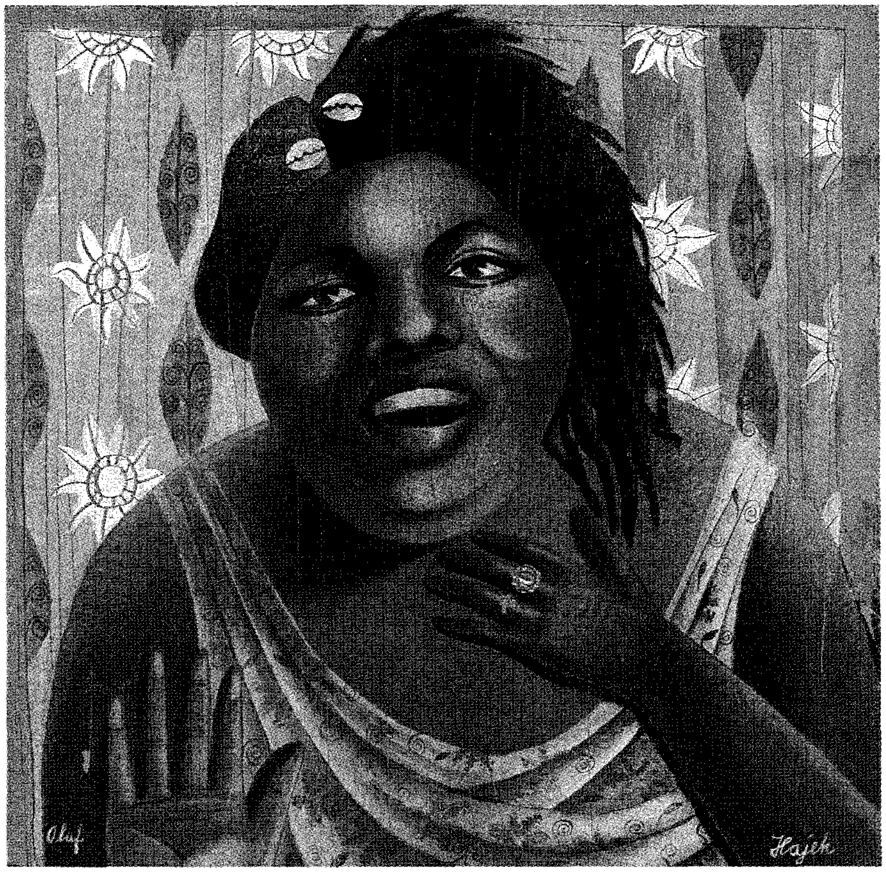
and a pensive soprano player, Moody has done his most significant work on the tenor sax, on which you can hear all that he's absorbed, from his days as a featured soloist in Dizzy Gillespie's late-forties big band to Moody's own funky ensembles of the fifties to his strong stint with Dizzy's quintet of the sixties. He has yet to stop investigating the improvisational byways of modern jazz. Humor, for Moody, is just a tool to keep his audience's awe at bay. The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, along with guests including saxophonists Jimmy Heath and Paquito D'Rivera, Tito Puente, singers Annie Ross and Jon Hendricks, trombonist Slide Hampton, and trumpeter Jon Faddis, helps this undervalued master celebrate his birthday. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. April 3 at 8.)



The Brazilian singer Virgínia Rodrigues, appearing at Joe's Pub.

OLAF HAJEK

THIRD EYE BLIND
After the radio-friendly power pop of "Semi-Charmed Life" helped give this San Francisco-based quartet a huge hit in 1997, Third Eye Blind returned last year with the album "Blue." The follow-up exposes the band's weaknesses (pomposity, overproduction, and the adenoidal sting of vocalist Stephan Jenkins); predictably, it has failed to galvanize the record-buying masses. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. April 3 at 8.)

CROSBY, STILLS, NASH & YOUNG
Between Neil Young's innumerable solo projects and David Crosby's life as a stud for hire (he's the father of Melissa Etheridge's children), Stephen Stills and Graham Nash somehow found the time to wrangle the old post-folkie supergroup together. The result was a decent comeback record called "Looking Forward." Though the band couldn't come up with anything as seminal as "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," those classic four-part harmonies sound as fresh as ever. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. April 3-4 at 8.)

TRACY CHAPMAN
It's been years since "Fast Car" turned this earnest folksinger into an overnight sensation; that damn car must be the bane of her existence. Nevertheless, she continues to make fine records that showcase her dusky vocals and her ever-present sense of justice: "Telling Stories" is her latest. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. April 4 at 8.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOTTOM LINE
15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 31: **Doc Watson.** The majority of folk revivalists perform as if they had formaldehyde in their veins, but the septuagenarian blind guitarist Watson (whose roots are in rockabilly) has an emotional range that rivals the five-century span of his repertoire (everything from Elizabethan ballads to backwater blues and country standards). With **Kate Campbell.**

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—March 28-29: **Ryuichi Sakamoto.** Best known for his robotic work with the early-eighties Japanese synth-pop combo Yellow Magic Orchestra, Sakamoto has become both an unpredictable avant-rock collaborator (he's recorded with Arto Lindsay, Thomas Dolby, and David Byrne, among others) and a writer of regal film scores ("The Last Emperor" and "Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence" are a couple of his best). In 1998, he released "Discord," his first classical record. Live, he has a reputation for meticulous performances and unexpected guests.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—April 1: **Barbez,** a multilingual Brooklyn quintet that produces woozy café rock. Elements of klezmer, French *musette,* punk, and tango are bound together by moody, smart lyrics and a mesmerizing accordion redolent of dripping candles.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—April 3: Peter Gabriel and Joe Jackson veteran **Joy Askew** performs her own exotic pop. April 4: The music of **Sophia Ramos Dupré** defies stereotypes. The thirty-one-year-old Bronx-born Nuyorican singer stops short of nothing but deeply passionate rock and roll. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 29: **Trisha Yearwood.** Since her hit-filled début in 1991, this powerful singer has been an inspiration to every starry-eyed female vocalist in Nashville. She brings a rare sense of integrity to the music, which her "new country" admirers would do well to emulate. She's in town in support of her latest album, "Real Live Woman." March 31: The precocious Irish folksinger **Luka Bloom,** best known for his ingenious acoustic cover of L.L. Cool J's "I Need Love."

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—March 28-29 and April 4-5: The world has been a sweeter place since the Brazilian composer and singer Caetano Veloso discovered a former manicurist and wedding singer named **Virgínia Rodrigues** in Salvador de Bahia some six years ago. Veloso produced Rodrigues's acclaimed début, "Sol Negro," and he has lent his support to her recently released follow-up album, "Nós," on which Rodrigues's ambrosial contralto offers meditative tributes to the carnival music of her homeland.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—March 29: The underrated high-voltage post-punk pop of Seattle's **Fastbacks.** March 31-April 2: **Lou Reed.** New York's own perpetually dyspeptic balladeer recently published a book of his collected lyrics. But he's been busy musically as well: after a brief detour composing the oddly Germanic score for "Time Rocker," his dubious musical-theatre collaboration with Robert Wilson, Reed returns to cranky form on "Ecstasy," his surprisingly strong new CD.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 31: The edgy urban folktales of **Richard Buckner.** April 3: **Robbie Fulks's** new album, "The Very Best of Robbie Fulks," isn't a collection of greatest hits, but rather a roundup of his less well-known songs, including some of the highly ironic country prankster's earliest, and finest, work.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—March 30-April 1: The **Gary Burton** and **Makoto Ozone** duo. Burton hooked up with pianist Ozone when the latter entered the Berklee School of Music in the early eighties; their fertile partnership, particularly when playing in a duet setting, frees up the virtuoso vibraphonist to expose his more assertive side as well as his celebrated lyricism. Dining.

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—**Nancy Wilson** burst onto the scene back in 1959 with a thrilling voice, a tremendous presence, a brilliant feel for the music, and a smoldering beauty that was impossible to resist. She just as quickly went the glossy supper-club route, playing the big casinos, making television appearances, and recording lush, uninspired albums. But live she's still got it. She appears here with her trio through April 2. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through April 2: The **Pharoah Sanders** quartet. With soulful balladeering now tempering his titanic eruptions, Sanders has become the complete saxophonist. It's been quite an evolution for the roaring iconoclast who once made even late-period Coltrane sound reserved; rather than have them running for the doors, Sanders' colossal tone and naked emotivity on tenor and soprano now embrace audiences openheartedly. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Members of the inventive and hardworking Jazz Composers Collective

settle in this week. March 29: The **Herbie Nichols Project** honors the underappreciated pianist and composer, who died in 1967. Nichols only recorded on a handful of occasions and passed in relative obscurity. The work, however, is all golden; his compositions have an outsider tinge and a formal perfection that rival Thelonious Monk's. Since Nichols only recorded his tunes in piano-trio settings, it'll be a pleasure to hear them fleshed out by this horn-driven band. March 30: Saxophonist and composer **Ted Nash** convenes his Double Quartet, whose recent album, "Rhyme & Reason," was a high point of 1999. Nash is joined by other members of the Collective, including pianist **Frank Kimbrough** and bassist **Ben Allison,** and a compact string section that adds alluring dimensions to Nash's pieces. March 31: **Ben Allison & Medicine Wheel.** One of the most interesting of the new-jazz ensembles that have formed during the nineties, Medicine Wheel rotates around the leader's bantering bass work and his adventurous writing, which give saxophonists Ted Nash and Michael Blake and pianist Frank Kimbrough plenty to sink their teeth into. Dining.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—March 31: The **Mark Egan** trio. Egan, one of the most creative electric bassists to have come of age in the shadow of Jaco Pastorius, has never let his extravagant technique take precedence over his solid musical instincts.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—March 31-April 1: The **Billy Harper** quintet. The seventies had their share of Coltrane-inspired tenorists with imperious tones and volcanic energy, but something—poetry, perhaps—always set Harper apart. His recent work with Randy Weston and with his own electrifying group has proved that he's still in touch with the muse.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through April 2: The **Lou Donaldson** quartet. Well-turned bop spills into R. & B. terrain when Donaldson, an alto saxophonist, hits the stage, pledging allegiance to both virtuosity and entertainment. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Once serenely indifferent to art after Gauguin, the Met's curators have been playing catch-up on MOMA's turf for fifty years. **"Painters in Paris: 1895-1950"** proves that they've come a long way. Nearly a quarter of the hundred or so paintings are by Picasso, including his famous portrait of Gertrude Stein, which she bequeathed to the surprised museum at a time when it didn't own a single work by the artist. Also represented here in depth are Matisse, Bonnard, Braque, and Balthus. As you might expect, the Met's version of modernism has a slightly conservative flavor: tradition-loving eccentrics like Derain, Marquet, Vallaton, and Helion make a strong showing, while Duchamp, Dali, and Mondrian are missing. This may be a philanthropic accident, but it's a happy one, leaving New York with duelling, Rashomonic versions of twentieth-century painting's golden age. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"Walker Evans,"** a comprehensive retrospective, the photographer's first. Through May 14. ♦ **"The World of Scholar's Rocks."** Through Aug. 20. ♦ **"Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt."** Through May 7. ♦ **"Tilman Riemenschneider: Master Sculptor of the Late Middle Ages."** Through May 14. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

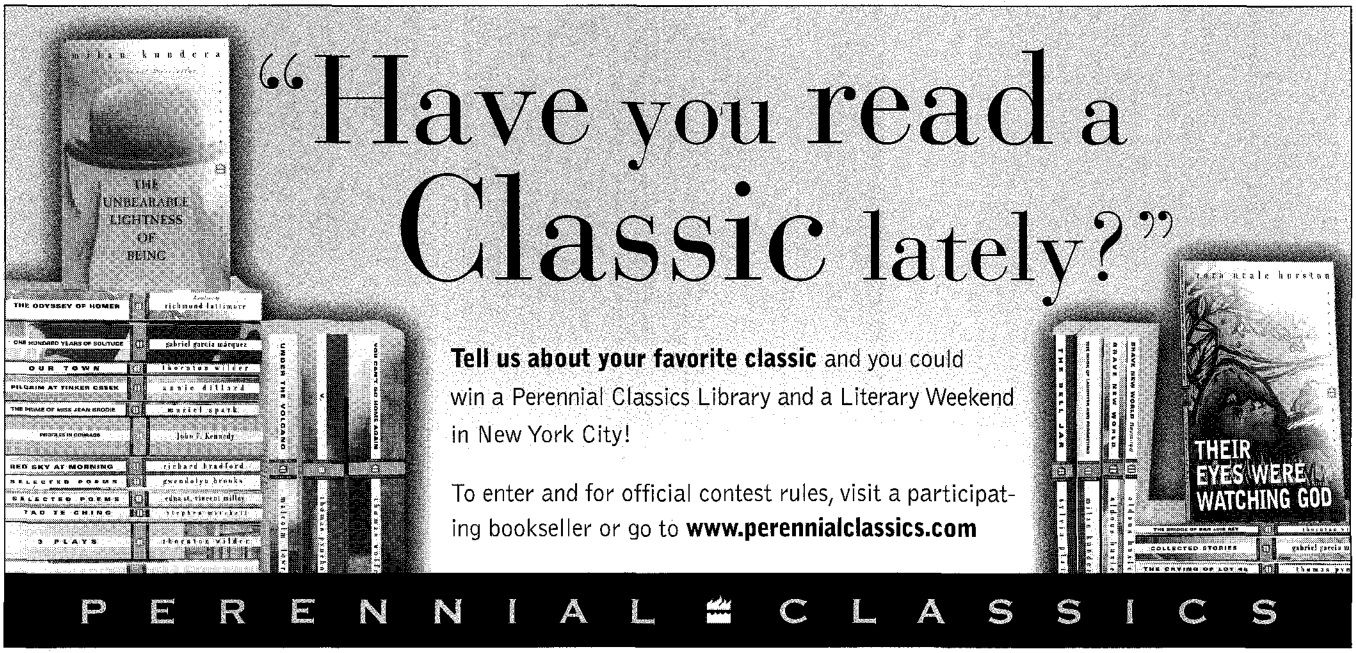
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—MOMA goes multiplex with the launch of **"Making Choices,"** the first eleven segments of an eventual twenty-four-part show all focussed on works made between 1920 and 1960. As they did for the recent "People, Places and Things," the curators have drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings to mount the show. But while that sprawling trilogy ricocheted from homogeneity to disjunction, this show offers a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist. A small gallery on the first floor features the lush photography of Man Ray; its larger next-door neighbor sports architectural drawings and models by Louis Kahn. On the second floor the succinctly titled "War" pairs photographs from the U.S. naval archives with Picasso's gut-wrenching grisaille painting "The Charnel House," from 1945, which echoes his masterpiece "Guernica." The segue from horror to housewares—an installation of etchings by still-life maestro Giorgio Morandi—is strange, but soothing. Curator Robert Storr's contribution, "Modern Art Despite Modernism," charts the course of representational paintings and includes a gorgeous Alex Katz portrait of his wife, Ada, which is so vital that it makes the models in the Philip Pearlstein painting to its right look like something from a mortuary slab. Through July 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—With green laser beams ricocheting through a six-story waterfall, and hundreds of TV screens providing ambient noise and light, the Nam June Paik retrospective looks, from ground level, like a sure-fire crowd-pleaser. Instead it leaves one disenchanted and puzzled. For the most part, the father of video art comes off as an unexpectedly slight figure, a likable, playful avant-gardist whose imaginative resources have seldom matched his commitment to the idea of innovation. Through April 26. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The Whitney **2000 Biennial Exhibition,** with ninety-seven artists (painters, sculptors, photographers, and installation and Internet artists, as well as videographers and filmmakers) chosen by a team of six curators. Through June 4. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The newly renovated Hayden Planetarium lets you enjoy a twenty-minute cosmic journey, narrated by Tom Hanks, which goes from Earth to the Milky Way out to the Virgo Supercluster, then through a black hole right back home. Reservations for regular Space Shows are advised, and available at 769-5200. ♦ **"Body Art: Marks of Identity."** Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Guennol Collection: Cabinet of Wonders."** Over the past fifty years, Alastair Bradley Martin and his wife, Edith, have amassed an eclectic collection of art and objects under the pseudonym Guennol, after the Welsh word for "martin" (the couple honeymooned in Wales). The installation of Joseph Cornell's "Starfish" smack in the center of the introductory wall text is a tip that you're in for something out of the ordinary. The show is cleverly organized around the theme of the seventeenth-century *Wunderkammer,* an assemblage of artistic treasures and natural wonders, rather than along more conventional chronological or art-historical lines. DeKooning's ferocious "Woman"—a fine drawing from the mid-fifties—salaciously bares her teeth beside a New Mexican sculpture of a female skeleton while a massive Japanese guardian head from the thirteenth century looks on. As for



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PERENNIAL CLASSICS

wonders, it's hard to beat the small chunk of rattlesnake agate titled "Gorilla Playing a Tom-Tom." Through May 7. ♦ **"Hiroshige: One Hundred Famous Views of Edo"** showcases the museum's complete set, one of the finest extant, by the influential master of the wood-block print. Through April 23. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (849-8300)—With dozens of bright hues of translucent plastic, glowing scrims and computer monitors, and occasional bursts of recorded machine-gun fire, the **National Design Triennial** makes Andrew Carnegie's stately Fifth Avenue mansion seem like the site of a smoothly executed palace coup. The curators, Donald Albrecht, Ellen Lupton, and Steven Skov Holt, have grouped works by eighty-three mostly young designers and firms under eight vague categories: Fluid, Physical, Unbelievable, and so on. Exuberance and breadth, not clarity, are the reigning spirits—which suits an era when architects, graphic designers, and product designers wield ever more powerful software in an upbeat business cycle. The icons of the moment are here—the iMac, the Air Jordan, and pieces by Frank Gehry and Martha Stewart—along with the expected aerodynamic staplers, ergonomic toothbrushes, carburetor-shaped buildings, and sci-fi movie clips. If we had to take something home, though, it would be Robert Egger's pleasantly old-fashioned Go-Go Bike, a luscious hot-pink bicycle with a heart-shaped fold-out liquor cabinet. Through Aug. 6. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
Seventh Ave. at 27th St. (217-5800)—**"The Little Black Dress and Other Signs of Status"** includes only one L.B.D. (an appropriately skimpy Balenciaga), leaving room for seven categories of characteristically black items, including boots, veils, and the infamous turtleneck, shown both in a 1956 *Life* spread on Beat style and on the 1997 *Newsweek* cover on Princess Diana for the issue announcing her death. Two black kimonos, one for mourning and the other for marriage, along with several tuxedos tagged "for servant and celebrant both," successfully suggest black's adaptability, while a section on chemically dangerous black dyes points out the actual menace behind the chosen color of mourners, models, and poseurs everywhere. Through April 15. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, noon to 8; Saturdays, 10 to 5.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (534-1672)—**"This Land Is Your Land"** lovingly presents the life and work of Woodrow Wilson Guthrie (1912-67), from his birth in Okemah, Oklahoma, through his travels and eventual arrival in New York at the beginning of the Second World War, and his first hospitalization with Huntington's disease in the late fifties to his last years on Mermaid Avenue in Coney Island. The show, whose curators and consultants include several Guthries and Seegers, travelled here from the Smithsonian; it's a maze of tall, overstuffed Plexiglas vitrines stocked with Guthrie's art work, scribbled lyrics, recordings, and family photos. All this ephemera leads to a video devoted to Guthrie's legacy, in which Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen, along with Ani DiFranco, Billy Bragg, and Wilco, pay homage to the bard. Bragg and Wilco's recordings of previously unheard Guthrie lyrics rise above the rest, bringing home the show's point that this is a living legacy. Through April 23. ♦ Across the hall, **"Songs of the City"** includes sheet music for such lost Manhattanite treasures as "I Live Uptown" and "The Subway Glide." The mini-show leads directly to **"New York Century,"** a gallery-long time line cum time capsule of the past hundred years. The artfully random selection of memorabilia includes an original Times Square news "zipper," a 1979 "We Are Happy to Serve You" coffee-cup-shaped skirt in Ultrasuede, and a SoHo-loft dollhouse from the early nineties, which includes a downstairs boutique, an upstairs gallery, and an eternally unfinished apartment on top. Through April 23. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

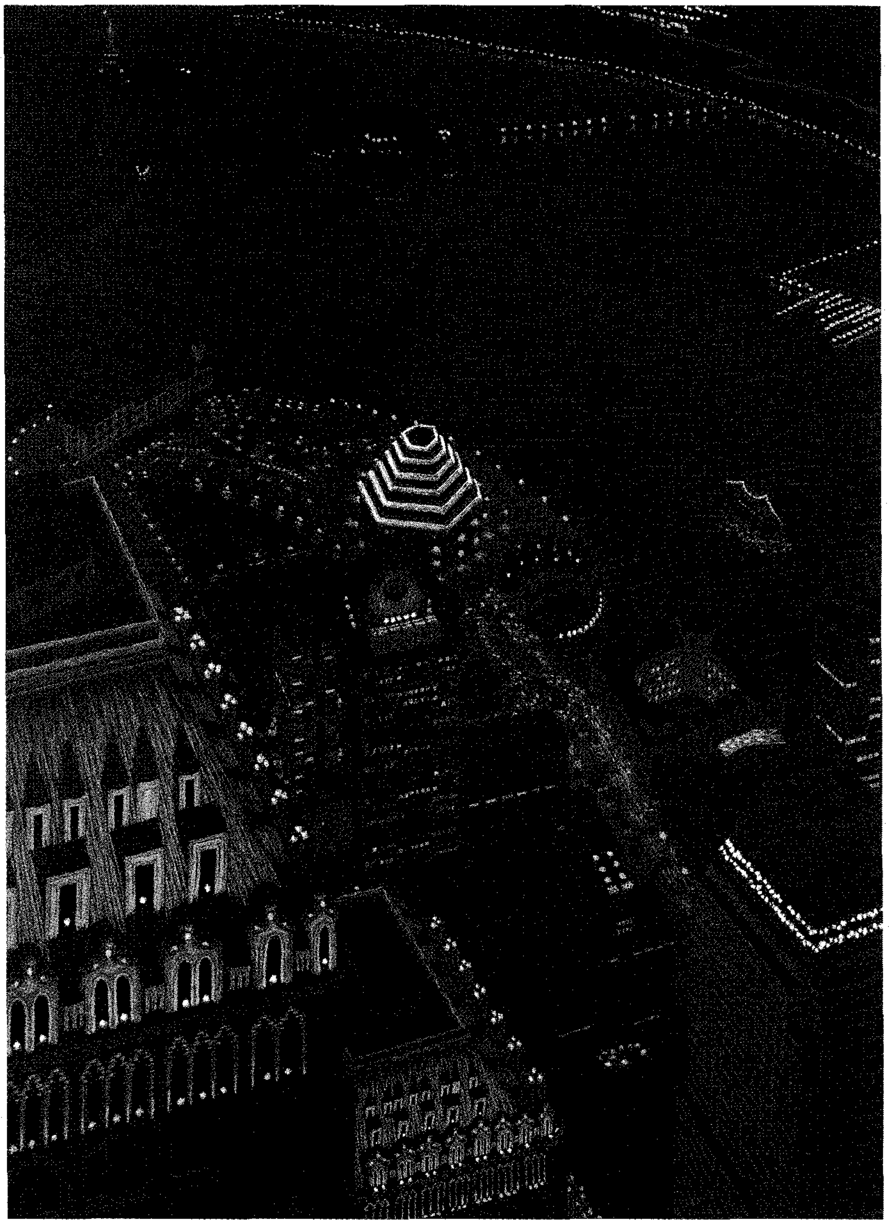
GALLERIES–UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

PHILIP GUSTON
Small works made at the beginning and end of the artist's celebrated, controversial late period. Some of these improvisational images of hooded figures and banal objects are warmup exercises; others represent the artist at his laconic best. Our favorite shows a pair of bricks or rocks, stacked like a fledgling cairn. It's hard to imagine a more rudimentary motif: something that doesn't expect or perhaps deserve to be painted here finds its perfectly appropriate, clumsy, matter-of-fact voice. Through April 22. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 688-5951.)

YVONNE JACQUETTE
Cityscapes, done from a nearly aerial perspective, painted from studios in the World Trade Center and Chicago's Sears Tower. Through April 15. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

URSULA VON RYDINGSVARD
Monumental sculptures made from hundreds of narrow cedar beams, glued together and then attacked with a circular saw. The resulting forms



ACROPHILIA *Like so many people in high places, Yvonne Jacquette has begun to take liberties: when she feels like it, she wanders from floor to floor in the World Trade Center or the Sears Tower to get a different angle on the cityscape below. The results are spliced overviews, not quite faithful to actual topography, but remarkably loyal to the cities' bright, vertiginous excitement. Squint at these paintings and you feel as though you're looking up instead of down—at twinkling stellar geometries, a warm and terrestrial version of the icy night sky, lit by constellations whose names we know: the Circle Line, the Holocaust Museum, and Lady Liberty with her yellow torch, a high solitary spark that could be Jacquette's signature (see Galleries–Uptown).*

have complicated, hacked, fractured surfaces, though their essential shapes are often simple. On view are several stacked bowls or tubs, and, most impressive, a furrowed eight-foot-high wall, like the remains of a lumberyard after a visit from a lackadaisical termite colony. These are seductively rugged sculptures, though von Rydingsvard seems to be using maximal means to achieve minimal effects. Through April 29. (Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. 315-0470.)

Short List

ANTHONY CARO
Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110.
Through April 22.
NANCY GRAVES
Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550.
Through April 20.
PETER WEGNER
Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
752-2929. Through April 29.

GALLERIES-CHELSEA

ALIGHIERO BOETTI
In 1968, this Italian artist, who died six years ago at the age of fifty-four, declared himself twins in an act of conceptual coquetry which underscored his playful approach to making art. This selection of twenty years of works on paper is a quiet introduction to the self-proclaimed "Shaman Showman" (the title of an early poster work, not included here). Though some of the drawings feel a little shopworn, the best, like a large three-panel watercolor of swarming airplanes, exude an exhilaratingly irrational logic. Through April 8. (Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 206-9300.)

UGO RONDINONE
This Swiss artist is a one-man band whose winsome New York début offers something for everyone: a site-specific installation, S & M photographs, a melancholy video projection, big abstract paintings, even a diaristic text piece. The kicker is that he pulls it off, like a magician pulling handkerchief after handkerchief out of his hat. In the video installation (whose long title culminates in the phrase "a place where nothing happens"), the artist intones the lyric "everyday sunshine" in a song that rarely lifts above a dirge while grainy footage of solitary figures flickers on the wall in a permanent twilight. Through April 15. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 243-0200.)

DAN WALSH
Happy paintings that marry the breezy abstraction of Mary Heilman with the systematic rigor of Peter Halley. You nearly get a whiff of Magic Marker from the deceptively childlike rendering (never mind that the materials are actually acrylic on canvas) as wobbly rectilinear forms culminate in architectonic compositions. In the front gallery, an untitled diptych contrasts a minimalist grid of gray on white, like so many rows of filing cabinets, with an accumulation of boxes in a jelly-bean-bright palette. The painting is narrowly banded at its top and bottom, as if to contain its buoyant contents. Through April 15. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Short List

RITA ACKERMANN
Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 627-6000.
Through April 15.
JEREMY BLAKE
Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 929-0500.
Through April 15.
MAUREEN GALLACE
303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.
Through April 29.
RENEE GREEN
Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366.
Through April 8.
KIK SEROR
I-20 Gallery, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100.
Through April 29.

GALLERIES-DOWNTOWN

"SHEER REALITIES: CLOTHING AND POWER IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PHILIPPINES."
This entrancing exhibition examines the rise of mestizo culture, the Filipino mixed-race middle class whose customs and dress borrowed from both Spanish and indigenous traditions, but remained distinct from both. Artifacts range from heavily beaded bags by the Bagobo people to an elaborate silver toothpick holder in the shape of a pineapple. That tropical fruit plays a starring role in the sartorial saga. Its fibers provide the basis of piña cloth, a sheer fabric favored by mestizos in their delicately embroidered shirts and blouses, examples of which are seen on mannequins and in revealing nineteenth-century portraits. Through April 22. (Grey Art Gallery, 100 Washington Square E. 998-6780.)

Short List

CASEY COOK
Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.
Through April 22.
CARL FUDGE
Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through May 6.
RICHARD LONG
Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St.
431-3685. Through April 29.

PHOTOGRAPHY

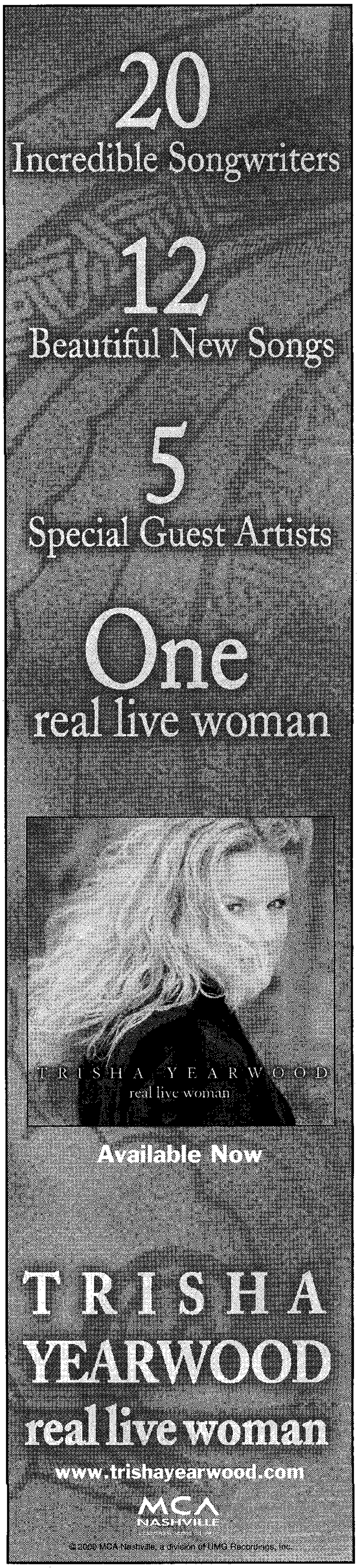
CHUCK CLOSE
Close's recent portraits of artists and actors hang here alongside his new daguerreotypes. Several eight-by-ten self-portraits solidly reclaim M. Daguerre's medium for this century, and a group of nude diptychs, showing the fronts and backs of tattooed and wrinkled torsos, make excellent use of its flawed glow. Through April 22. (Pace MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999.)

MARY ELLEN MARK
This esteemed documentarian, who has been compared to Diane Arbus and Walker Evans, has specialized for the last thirty-five years in everyday peculiarity. In her portrait of three acrobats, dressed for performance with the Vazquez Brothers Mexico City circus, theatrical femininity is as graceful as it is haunting. In a picture of two young girls in a suburban pool, one teaching the other how to float, banality provides the shock. Through April 22. (Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010.)

TRACEY MOFFATT
The bad news is that the latest work by this Australian star has none of the punch of last spring's "Laudanum" series; for all the big-budget special effects, these photos (of subjects including an oiled-up couple groping through the desert and a little girl dodging trees with eyes) look like dime-a-dozen Photoshop stunts. The good news is that Moffatt completely reinvents her subject, format, and technique for each project, so this wan psychedelia is unlikely to appear again. She has also commissioned a video whose finale is a compilation of Hollywood's most histrionic scenes of paintings being slashed and sculptures being smashed. This wonderfully silly, adrenaline-charged desecration of art is a refreshing way to end a day in Chelsea. Through April 8. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200.)

ORIT RAFF
This young Israeli photographer's deceptively simple work makes the ordinary seem remarkable. In the current exhibition, pictures of grammar-school desk tops, notebooks, and blackboards—some evocatively installed to suggest their classroom positions—have a surprising beauty that supersedes recollections of eighth-period tedium. Through April 8. (Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.)

JAMES RAVILIOUS / HUMPHREY SPENDER
Two British documentarians, working decades apart, show "The Landscape and People of England" glowing in that country's characteristic cloudy, diffuse light. Both shows through April 8. (Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051.)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NEW YORK Philharmonic
KURT MASUR, MUSIC DIRECTOR

THU APR 13 8:00PM
FRI APR 14 8:00PM
SAT APR 15 8:00PM

Kurt Masur CONDUCTOR
Deborah Voigt SOPRANO

Rachmaninoff: *Isle of the Dead*
Barber: *Andromache's Farewell*, for Soprano and Orchestra
Britten: Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*
R. Strauss: Final Scene from *Salome*

Deborah Voigt displays the breadth of her vocal gifts in two contrasting works. Barber's *tortuous, circling* themes evoke the anguish of the Greek heroine Andromache bidding farewell to her son; then, Ms. Voigt seizes the ghoulish desire for John the Baptist's head in the biblical tale of Salome.

Tickets: $22-82.

Deborah Voigt

Gatti directs music of divine inspiration

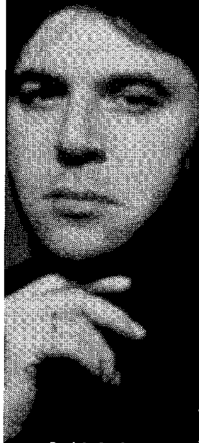
THU APR 27 8:00PM
FRI APR 28 11:00AM
SAT APR 29 8:00PM
MON MAY 1 8:00PM

Daniele Gatti CONDUCTOR

Hindemith: *Nobilissima Visione*
Wagner: Good Friday Music from *Parsifal*
Mozart: Symphony No. 41, "Jupiter"

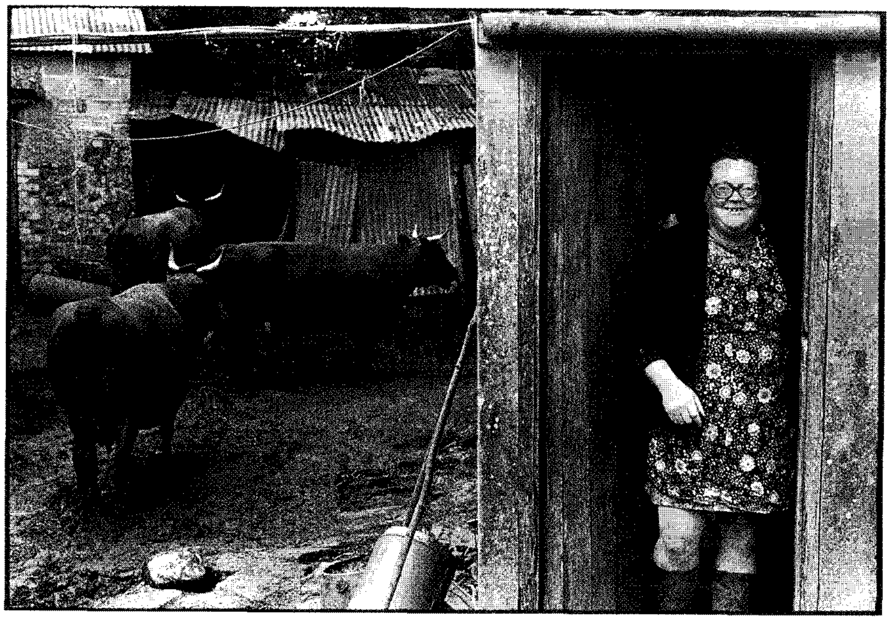
Hindemith's ballet finds divine inspiration in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, depicted in the mystical dream that resolved the Saint to a life of devoted service. The springtime message of spiritual rebirth and compassion is the guiding vision in Wagner's *Parsifal*.

Tickets: $16-77.



Daniele Gatti

For info. call (212) 875-5656. PHOTOS: VOIGT/DEVON CASS, GATTI/KARL GRANT



James Ravilious documents English country life (see Photography).

LOUIS ROBERT
Rare and beautiful paper negatives and prints of portraits, architecture, and landscapes from an early (1810-82) and little-known French photographic master, shown together for the first and likely last time in New York. Through April 15. (Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223.)

Short List

STANLEY GREENBERG / JULIUS SHULMAN
Yancey Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through April 8.

E. O. HOPPÉ
Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through April 22.

MICHAEL O'BRIEN
Dee/Glasoe, 529 W. 20th St. 924-7545. Through April 22.

GARY SCHNEIDER / "THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF 'FORTUNE' MAGAZINE"
International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6. Schneider show through April 9; *Fortune* show through May 14.

AMY STEINER / DODI WEXLER
Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 243-3335. Both shows through April 22.

WILLIAM SUTTLE
OK Harris, 383 W. Broadway. 431-3600. Through April 22.

"WALL STREET: A SURVEY IN PHOTOGRAPHS 1910-2000"
Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through April 8.

JOCKO WEYLAND
Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686. Through April 15.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

CHRISTIE'S
French and Continental furniture, tapestries, and decorative art works. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000. March 31.) ♦ Note: Through April 2, Christie's is exhibiting important pieces—none of them for sale—from three major Chinese institutions: the Capital, Beijing Art, and Ding Ling Museums.) ♦ At Christie's East: March 29: Nineteenth-century furniture and decorative pieces. ♦ April 4: Photography. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430.)

DOYLE
An auction of jewelry, watches, silverware, and coins. (175 E. 87th St. 427-2730. March 29-30.)

SWANN
March 30: A wide-ranging offering of books, sold "by the shelf" (with each lot comprising perhaps twenty titles). ♦ April 3: Nineteenth- and twentieth-century photography. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710.)

INTERNATIONAL ASIAN ART FAIR
The final day of this important gathering of international dealers. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. March 29. For information, call 642-8572.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
"La Bohème," with Leontina Vaduva, Ainhoa Arteta, Luis Lima, and Simon Keenlyside; conducted by Marco Armiliato. (March 29 at 7:30 and April 1 at 8:30.) ♦ **"Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk,"** by Shostakovich, with Catherine Malfitano, Vladimir Galouzine, Mark Baker, and Vladimir Ognovenko; Valery Gergiev. (March 30 at 7:30.) ♦ **"Il Barbiere di Siviglia,"** with Carmen Oprisanu, Paul Austin Kelly, Russell Braun, Paul Plishka, and Mr. Ognovenko; Bruno Campanella. (March 31 at 8.) ♦ With Michael Schade instead of Mr. Kelly. (April 4 at 7:30.) ♦ **"Die Walküre,"** the "second chapter" of Wagner's "Ring" cycle, which the company is presenting in its entirety this spring, with Jane Eaglen (as Brünnhilde), Deborah Voigt (as Sieglinde), Hanna Schwarz, Plácido Domingo, and James Morris; James Levine. (April 1 at 12:30.) ♦ **"Pelléas et Mélisande,"** with Dawn Upshaw, Nadine Denize, Dwayne Croft, and Willard White; Mr. Levine. (April 3 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

OPERA NOVA
Operagoers can invariably count on this company to shake up expectations. Its spring production is Bellini's "I Puritani," transformed by the company's director, Robert Turner, into "The Puritans Go Shopping." This retelling, set in a shopping mall, involves the hapless Elvira, her respectable suburban family, her ineffectual boyfriend, and the biker who tries to seduce her; audiences will probably find its convoluted plot about as easy to follow as Bellini's original. (Sanford Meisner Theatre, 164 Eleventh Ave., at 22nd St. March 29-31 at 7:30, April 1 at 2 and 7:30, and April 2 at 3. For information about tickets, call 724-8204.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA
March 29 and March 31 at 8 and April 2 at 1:30: "Tosca." ♦ March 30 and April 4 at 7:30: "La

Clemenza di Tito." ♦ April 1 at 1:30: Virgil Thomson's "The Mother of Us All," spotlighting soprano Lauren Flanigan in the role of Susan B. Anthony. ♦ April 1 at 8: "Carmen." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

OPERAWORKS
The company's season, which runs through July 1, includes eleven operas in repertory (all fully, if modestly, staged, and accompanied by synthesizer). March 30, April 1, and April 3 at 8: "The Seagull," by Thomas Pasatieri (after Chekhov's play). ♦ March 31 and April 4 at 8: Walton's "Façade," Peter Maxwell Davies' "Fool's Fanfare," and Holst's "Sāvitri." (Raw Space Theatre, 529 W. 42nd St. For information about tickets, call 873-9531.)

COCTEAU ON STAGE
The French Institute Alliance Française is spending three days this week eulogizing the poet, playwright, and aesthete-around-Paris Jean Cocteau. March 30 at 7:20: Following the screening of a documentary video about Cocteau (at 6), musicians from Pennsylvania State University perform chamber works by the members of "Les Six," the slightly bad-boy (and one bad-girl) composers who clustered around Cocteau. ♦ March 31 and April 1 at 8: The world première of "Paul and Virginie," a music drama with a libretto by Cocteau and Raymond Radiguet (translated into English), based on Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's eighteenth-century novel. Satie was to have written the music, but the project came to a halt with his death, in 1925. A musical score has recently been provided by Charles Kalman, who played piano for Cocteau as a young man and studied with Darius Milhaud (one of Les Six). The work is performed here in English, by musicians from Penn State. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160.)

OPÉRA FRANÇAIS DE NEW YORK
Except for its overture (and that on increasingly rare occasions), Ferdinand Hérold's opera "Zampa, ou La Fiancée de Marbre" has all but disappeared from the scene. Its action is a Sicilian variation on the Don Juan legend: the pirate Zampa is punished for his amorous misdeeds by the supernatural intervention of the statue of a betrayed lover. In one of opera's most outlandish endings, Zampa is crushed to death in the statue's marble arms while (for good measure) Mt. Etna erupts in flames, engulfing both him and the statue in a flow of lava. Premièred in 1831, the piece remained popular throughout the nineteenth century; this concert performance, however, will be the piece's first airing in New York in more than a hundred years. Soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and tenor Tracey Welborn head the cast, and Yves Abel conducts. The company here follows its tradition of abbreviating its original-language presentations through the overlay of an English narration, which will be delivered by Alexander Herold, a descendant of the composer. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. April 3 at 8.)

"DER JASAGER"
Kurt Weill composed this thirty-five-minute opera in 1930, to a text by Bertolt Brecht, as an adventurous vehicle for school-aged performers. Its libretto is derived from a fifteenth-century Noh drama, "Taniko," whose inherent criticism of exploitative social mores appealed greatly to Brecht's and Weill's Marxist leanings. The Japan Society has had the happy inspiration to stage both works on the same program—first the Noh drama, performed (in Japanese) by the dramatic troupe Nohgaku-za (whose twenty-eight members, directed by Kanze Hideo, are joined by the distinguished Noh actors Umekawa Rokuro and Hosho Kan), then the opera (in an English translation), conducted by Julius Rudel and featuring mezzo-soprano Mimi Lerner and bass-baritone Dale Travis. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 752-3015. April 4-7 at 7:30 and April 8 at 2 and 7:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Valery Gergiev conducts Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Midori) and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 14 (a Mahler-style symphonic song cycle, here featuring soprano Elena Prokina and baritone Sergei Leiferkus). (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 30-April 1 at 8 and April 4 at 7:30.)

CZECH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
Vladimir Ashkenazy conducts Mozart's Symphony in D Major (K. 504, the "Prague"), Dvořák's Violin Concerto (featuring Kurt Nikkanen), Martinů's "Frescoes of Piero della Francesca," and Tchaikovsky's Fantasy-Overture "Romeo and Juliet." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 29 at 8.)

SACRED MUSIC IN A SACRED SPACE
Kent Tritle directs the Choir and Orchestra of St. Ignatius Loyola, plus several soloists, in Domenico Scarlatti's "Stabat Mater" and Marc-Antoine Charpentier's "Filius Prodigus." (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. March 29 at 8.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S
Roberto Abbado conducts Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Hindemith's "Mathis der Maler" Symphony, and Beethoven's Violin Concerto (with Joshua Bell). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 29 at 8.)

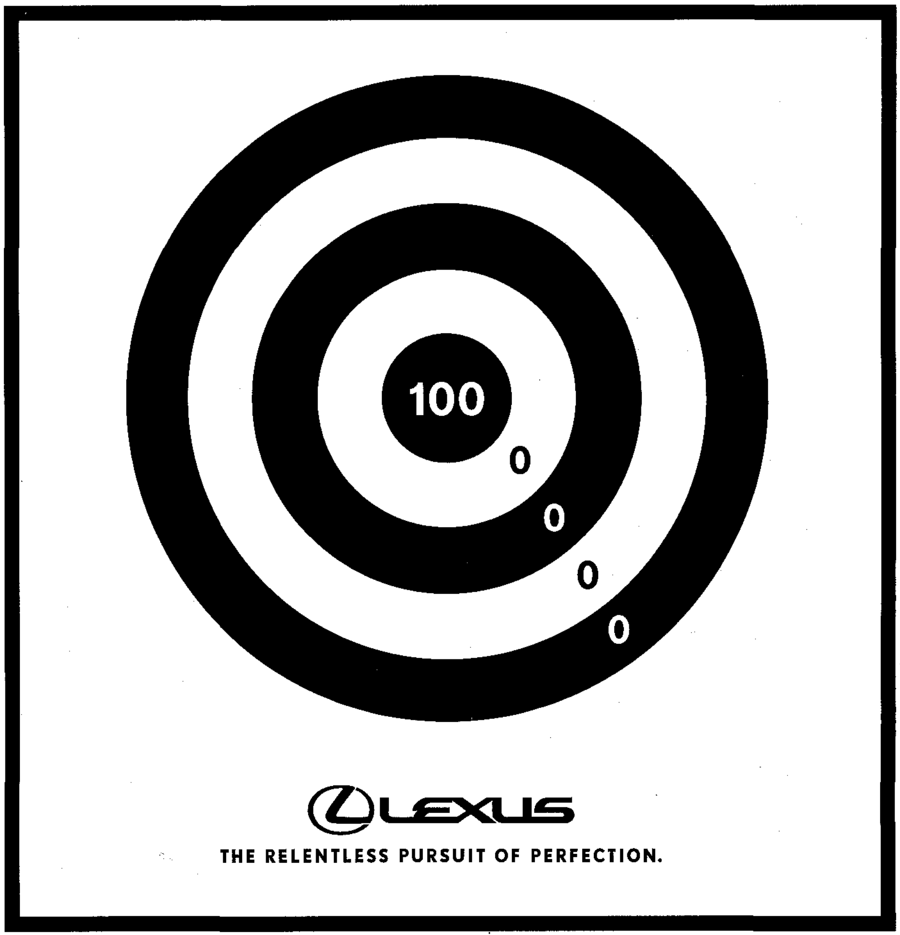
CONCERTO ITALIANO
Rinaldo Alessandrini leads the period-instrument group in concertos and cantatas by Vivaldi, with contralto Sara Mingardo. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 30 at 8.)

CURTIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
André Previn conducts the conservatory orchestra, from Philadelphia, in Rorem's Symphony No. 3, Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 3 (featuring Jaime Laredo), and Brahms's Symphony No. 4. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 30 at 8.)

EOS ORCHESTRA
Jonathan Sheffer conducts Copland's complete score for the ballet "Appalachian Spring," in addition to suites from his film scores for "The Cummington Story," "The North Star," and "The City." (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. March 30 at 8. For information about tickets, call 691-6415. ♦ Theatre in the Park, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens. 718-760-0064. April 2 at 3.)

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG CHOIR
March 30 at 8: Erwin Ortner directs the Viennese ensemble in several madrigals by Gesualdo and in Nono's "Cori di Didone" and "Ha Venido, Canciones para Silvia." Also on the program are Monteverdi's "Lamento d'Arianna," as well as Schoenberg's String Quartet No. 2 and his "Five Piano Pieces" (Op. 23). Pianist Maurizio Pollini and the Juilliard String Quartet are among the assisting artists. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. For information about tickets, call 247-7800.) ♦ April 1 at 8: Mr. Ortner leads Ockeghem's "Missa Prolationum," Josquin's "Déploration sur la Mort de Johannes Ockeghem," and Palestrina's "Stabat Mater"; also on the program is a performance of Beethoven's A-Minor String Quartet (Op. 132), played by the Juilliard String Quartet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. For information about tickets, call 247-7800.) ♦ April 4 at 8: The choir, joined by the New York Choral Artists and numerous instrumentalists, offers music by Giacomo Manzoni and Schumann (including the latter's "Concerto without Orchestra" and "Davidsbündlertänze," in which Mr. Pollini goes it solo). (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. April 4 at 8.)

AMERICAN COMPOSERS ORCHESTRA
April 2 at 3: Dennis Russell Davies leads the première of Jennifer Higdon's "Fanfare Rítmico," Antheil's "Ballet Mécanique" (whose percussion-rich Machine Age orchestration earned its composer instant notoriety following its première, in 1926), Copland's "Short Symphony," and Sessions's Symphony No. 3. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. ♦ Note: On April 1, beginning at 10 A.M., Carnegie Hall hosts a daylong symposium about Copland and Sessions, culminating in a chamber-music concert, at Weill Recital Hall. For information, call 903-9670.) ♦ April 3 at 9:30 A.M. and 12:30: Mr. Davies, Paul Lustig Dunkel, and Robert Beaser oversee two three-hour public reading sessions that



LEXUS
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focus on works by seven emerging composers. (Masonic Hall, 71 W. 23rd St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 977-8495.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
James Levine leads a program of serenades for large chamber ensembles (or small orchestras, depending on how you look at it): George Perle's Serenade No. 1 for Viola and Chamber Ensemble (featuring violist Michael Ouzounian), Schoenberg's Serenade (Op. 24, featuring bass-baritone Richard Paul Fink), and Brahms's Serenade No. 2 in A Major (Op. 16). (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. April 2 at 5.)

RECITALS

LOS ANGELES GUITAR QUARTET
The foursome plays original works and transcriptions, including music by Bach, Scott Tennant, Carlos Rafael Rivera, and Benjamin Verdery. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. March 29 at 8.)

BARGEMUSIC
March 30 and April 1 at 7:30: Presenting Mozart's Duo in B-Flat Major for Violin and Viola (K. 424), Schubert's "Drei Klavierstücke" (D. 946), and Brahms's G-Minor Piano Quartet. ♦ March 31 at 7:30 and April 2 at 4: Victoria Postnikova performs Beethoven's Sonata in C-Sharp Minor (Op. 27, No. 2, the "Moonlight"); three string-playing colleagues join her for sonatas by Shostakovich, for violin (with Ilya Grubert), viola (with Toby Hoffman), and cello (with Godfried Hoogeveen). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

JOSÉ CARRERAS
The tenor, in recital—for those prepared to countenance one of classical music's more bizarre groupie scenes. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. March 31 at 8.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
In its annual concert tribute to its founder, Charles Wadsworth, the society presents a Haydn string trio, Vaughan Williams's "On Wenlock Edge" (with tenor John Aler), and Bach's B-Minor Orchestral Suite (featuring flutist Ransom Wilson), among other works. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 31 at 8 and April 2 at 5.)

JUDITH INGOLFSSON
The Icelandic violinist, who in 1998 won first prize at the prestigious International Violin Competition of Indianapolis, performs Rorem's "Autumn Music," Bloch's "Poème Mystique," Brahms's Scherzo (from the "F-A-E Sonata"), Bach's Unaccompanied Sonata No. 3, and Wieniawski's "Fantaisie Brillante" (on themes from "Faust"). Pianist Ronald Sat assists. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. April 1 at 8.)

PAUL GALBRAITH
This guitarist has been keeping busy composing arrangements for his unusual instrument, a custom-designed eight-string guitar that he plays in vertical position, propping it upright like a cello. In this program, he offers his reworking of pieces by Bach, Britten, and Haydn. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. April 2 at 11 A.M. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

S.E.M. ENSEMBLE
The champions of "post-Cagian" aesthetics offer a pair of very long concerts at the Paula Cooper gallery. April 2 at 3: Morton Feldman's "For Philip Guston" (a four-and-a-half-hour-long work, composed in 1984). ♦ April 4 at 6:30: Petr Kotik's "Many Many Women" (to a text by Gertrude Stein) will last for many many hours—until about midnight. (534 W. 21st St. For information about tickets, call 718-488-7659.)

BARBARA QUINTILIANI
In her New York début recital, the soprano, the winner of the 1999 Marian Anderson International Vocal Arts Competition, performs works by Verdi, Strauss, Griffes, and others, with pianist Charles Woodward assisting. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. April 2 at 8:30.)

VÉRONIQUE GENS
In her New York début recital, the soprano performs songs by Schumann, Berlioz, Poulenc, and others, with pianist Brian Zeger assisting. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. April 3 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

ANDREW MANZE
Bach's D-Minor Toccata and Fugue (BWV 565), a staple of the organ literature and of horror-film soundtracks, has often struck scholars as unidiomatic for the "king of instruments"—curiously so, since its composer was acknowledged as one of the preëminent organists of his time. Occasionally the suggestion is put forth that the "broken articulation" of its contrapuntal lines is more typical of Bach's writing for the violin. Mr. Manze, the English violinist and a darling of the historical-performance movement, has recently put that theory into action by transcribing the organ piece "backwards" to a speculative original version, transposed to A Minor, for unaccompanied violin. The result does indeed sound as if it was native-born to the violin, at least when played as incisively as Manze renders it on his recent all-Bach recording for Harmonia Mundi. Manze places it at the head of this recital of unaccompanied violin music, which also includes Bach's Partita No. 2 in D Minor and works by Biber, Telemann, and Tartini. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. April 4 at 8.)

NEW JUILLIARD ENSEMBLE
Joel Sachs directs recent works by Linda Bouchard, John Magnussen (a première), Elliott Sharp, Peter Eötvös, and Magnus Lindberg. (Alice Tully Hall. April 4 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.)

NEW MUSIC FOR A NEW CENTURY
In this installment of the contemporary-music series, Jeffrey Milarsky conducts works by Giacinto Scelsi, Stuart Jones, Joshua Fineberg, Salvatore Sciarrino, and Gerald Levinson. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. April 4 at 8.)

SCHNITTKE CELEBRATION
In the first evening of a two-day tribute to the late composer Alfred Schnittke, the Lyric Chamber Music Society presents the Moscow String Quartet (whose members collaborated frequently with the composer) in a performance of his Quartet No. 1. Also on the program are Mozart's Violin Sonata in B-Flat Major (K. 454) and Glinka's "Grand Sextet," with pianist Tigran Alikhanov and double-bassist Timothy Cobb completing the ensemble. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. April 4 at 8. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

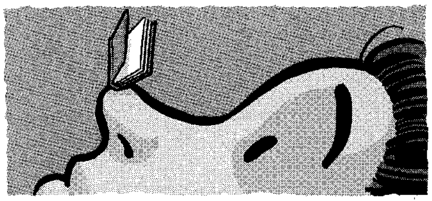
ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
March 29 at 8: By poets Anselm Hollo and Robert Kelly. (St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door.) ♦ April 3 at 6:30: By Ed Sanders, Joyce Johnson, and other writers, from poet Allen Ginsberg's posthumously published works, "Deliberate Prose" and "Poems for the Nation." (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ April 3 at 7:30: By Tom Disch and Bob Holman, from their poetry. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
April 3 at 6: New York *Times* writer Sam Roberts talks to novelist E. L. Doctorow about the future of New York City. (Celeste Bartos Forum, New York Public Library, Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. 930-0571.) ♦ April 4 at 6: Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., interviews Jacques Barzun, author of "From Dawn to Decadence: 500 Years of Cultural Triumph and Defeat, 1500 to Present." (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400.) ♦ April 4 at 6:30: The Skyscraper Museum, a temporarily homeless institution devoted to the city's most recognizable feature, brings together *New Yorker* architectural critic Paul Goldberger, developer William Rudin, architect Robert A. M. Stern, and builder Daniel R. Tishman to discuss the transition of Times Square from a short, seedy district to a tall, shiny tourist center. (Times Square Studios, Broadway at 44th St. For reservations, which are required, call 968-1961.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Get Small



"Vast is the kingdom of dust!" a science writer named J. Gordon Ogden exclaimed in 1912, just as that vast kingdom was, as it were, biting the dust. As Joseph A. Amato points out in **DUST: A HISTORY OF THE SMALL AND THE INVISIBLE** (University of California), twentieth-century advances in microscopy saw the virtual end of dust as the universal symbol of smallness. But dust—which helps human beings see colors and can be found at the bottom of the ocean—remains the original gateway into a realm of tininess which includes viruses and neutrinos. This modern-day "revolution of the petite," as Amato calls it, has "forced humans to recognize the immensity and might of the small."

In **A FIELD GUIDE TO THE INVISIBLE** (Holt), Wayne Biddle conducts a guided tour of the minuscule and the unseen, from bacteria ("Earth's most dominant form of life") to pollen, quarks, X rays, and a force that perplexed Aristotle, body odor. Sue Hubbell's **WAITING FOR APHRODITE** (Houghton Mifflin), a collection of companionable essays about invertebrate life, makes the case that "we humans are a minority of giants, stumbling around in a world of little things." Hubbell's investigation of the Lilliputian orders turns up such creatures as barnacles, pill bugs, sponges, and the elusive Aphrodite—a fuzzy undersea worm.

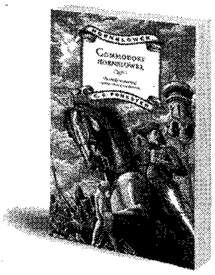
Man-made substances show a complexity "as wonderful as that found in living organisms," according to Ivan Amato in **STUFF: THE MATERIALS THE WORLD IS MADE OF** (Bard). This lively history of engineering suggests that the future is writ small, from the gallium arsenide in CD players to "buckyballs," synthetic molecular structures that can be manipulated like Tinkertoys. As microtechnology becomes ever more micro, Amato promises that "we ain't seen nothing compared to the materials that will come."

—*Mark Rozzo*

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Books.
[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

The Adventures of Horatio Hornblower



COMMODORE HORNBLOWER

by C.S. Forester

In a classic installment of the nautical adventure series that Winston Churchill found "vastly entertaining," the recently knighted Commodore Hornblower must face hostile armies, seductive royalty and sundry perils on a Baltic mission to stop the scourge of Europe from invading Sweden and Russia. (Back Bay Books)

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LORD HORNBLOWER

by C.S. Forester

When Lieutenant Chadwick's crew stages a mutiny and Lord Hornblower is called to the rescue, the intrepid admiral seizes the opportunity to extend the scope of his assignment into a conclusive battle against the French army and his arch enemy, Napoleon Bonaparte. (Back Bay Books)

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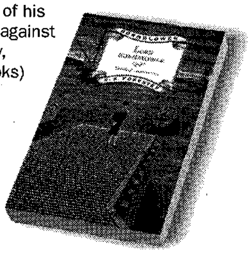

ADMIRAL HORNBLOWER IN THE WEST INDIES

by C.S. Forester

Admiral Hornblower's military and diplomatic skills are put to the test when he is drawn out of retirement for one final voyage. In a striking tale of high seas adventure, the legendary British naval officer attempts to impose order upon the chaos that reigns after the Napoleonic Wars. (Back Bay Books)

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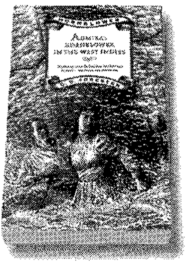

MR. MIDSHIPMAN HORNBLOWER

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At the young age of seventeen, the dauntless Hornblower finds his sea legs as an apprentice on a journey that sets the stage for his future military career. (Back Bay Books)

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by C.S. Forester

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MOVIES OPENING

BEAU TRAVAIL
A new film by Claire Denis, set in the East African enclave of Djibouti and based on Melville's "Billy Budd." In French. Opening March 31. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

THE COLOR OF PARADISE
An Iranian film about a young blind boy (Mohsen Ramezani) who is abandoned by his father. Directed by Majid Majidi. In Persian. Opening March 29.

THE FILTH AND THE FURY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 29. (Film Forum.)

HIGH FIDELITY
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 31.

LONG NIGHT'S JOURNEY INTO DAY
South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the subject of this documentary by Frances Reid and Deborah Hoffman. Opening March 31. (Film Forum.)

PRICE OF GLORY
Jimmy Smits plays a former prizefighter who trains his three sons for fistic glory. Directed by Carlos Avila. Opening March 31.

THE ROAD TO EL DORADO
An animated picture about two stowaways who explore the New World, seeking the fabled city of gold. Voices by Kevin Kline, Kenneth Branagh, and Rosie Perez. Music by Elton John. Opening March 31.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

AMERICAN BEAUTY
This amazing and impassioned fantasia about American loneliness begins as satire and ends with a vision of the sublime. The defeated suburban patriarch Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), condemned by his withdrawn daughter (Thora Birch) and his hyperorganized wife (Annette Bening), drops out of his job and misbehaves badly. After Lester's marriage gets blown apart by squalls of comic contempt, the movie, which was written by Alan Ball and directed by the British theatre maestro Sam Mendes (it's his first film), opens up and takes in Lester's suburban territory—the dissatisfactions of the business-mad nineties, in which the gospel of selfishness leaves people clenched and isolated. The bitter satirical riffs slowly give way to a mystical appreciation of the vagrant beauty trapped beneath the surface of life. The hard-edged, almost hyperreal cinematography, by Conrad L. Hall, and the editing, by Tariq Anwar and Chris Greenbury, shift back and forth between dream and actuality with mesmerizing beauty. With Mena Suvari as a teen vamp who is terrified of being ordinary, and Wes Bentley as a young drug dealer who uses his video camera to discover the hidden connections among things.—*David Denby* (9/20/99) (Beekman, East 85th Street, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, State, Village Theatre VII, and Ziegfeld.)

BEYOND THE MAT
Pro wrestling, America's new national pastime, gets a good thrashing in this documentary by Barry Blaustein. His voice-over narration is pitifully cliché-ridden, but what he captures on camera and records in interviews is a bloody eye-opener. The film follows a trio of wrestlers—Terry Funk, a well-respected thirty-year veteran, Jack (Jake the Snake) Roberts, a journeyman in rapid decline, and Mick (Mankind) Foley, a sweet-natured superstar with a loving family—through a tour of arenas and barns across the country. The candid portraits of events both inside the ring (the brutal, Thunderdome-like fight matches) and outside (the fearful, emotionally volatile family lives) call into question the generally accepted belief that wrestling is pure theatre. What emerges is profiles of men whose lives are wracked with pain (there's more stitching done here than at a Levi's factory) and an uncomfortable feeling that some of them have become crowd-pleasing junkies, hooked on the need to draw blood, even if it's their own.—*Bruce Diones* (42nd Street E Walk and Union Square.)

BOILER ROOM
A sensationally entertaining melodrama about young outer-borough louts in Canali suits who sell stocks of dubious value from a fly-by-night brokerage firm. Like "Wall Street" before it, this movie—written and directed by the twenty-seven-year-old Ben Younger—might be described as an ambivalent love letter to the outrageous hustle and greed of the great American bull market. Younger wants us to enjoy the young men's gleeful exhibitionism and powers of persuasion. At the same time, he depicts the brokers' triumphs as a low-life rampage. Amused, clear-sighted, and objective, "Boiler Room" has been made without false piety or hypocrisy. It stars Giovanni Ribisi as a young man lured into the brokerage house, and Ron Rifkin, in a brilliant performance, as his disapproving, federal-judge father. Among the young actors who play brokers, Ben Affleck, Vin Diesel, and Nicky Katt stand out.—*D.D.* (3/13/00) (Chelsea West, Cinema II, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.)

BOYS DON'T CRY
A delicately conceived but fearless movie. In small-town Nebraska, a young woman named Teena Brandon (Hilary Swank) clips her hair into a butch cut, flattens her breasts, puts on boys' clothes and a boy's swagger, and passes in the world as Brandon Teena, handsome young dude. What she feels is pure exhilaration, the excitement of leaving her past behind and becoming a lover; what we feel is dismay and fear. Brandon falls in with a group of derelict, white-trash kids and attracts the languid beauty Lana (Chloë Sevigny), who allows herself to think that Brandon is a man—with inevitably disastrous results. The movie is a fine, terrifying tragic poem that is also, at times, subversively funny: the women who like Brandon seem to want the feminine as well as the masculine in a lover. Director Kimberly Peirce, who wrote the screenplay with Andy Bienen, embraces a full-bodied lyrical realism in which nothing is exaggerated but nothing is avoided either.—*D.D.* (10/18-25/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

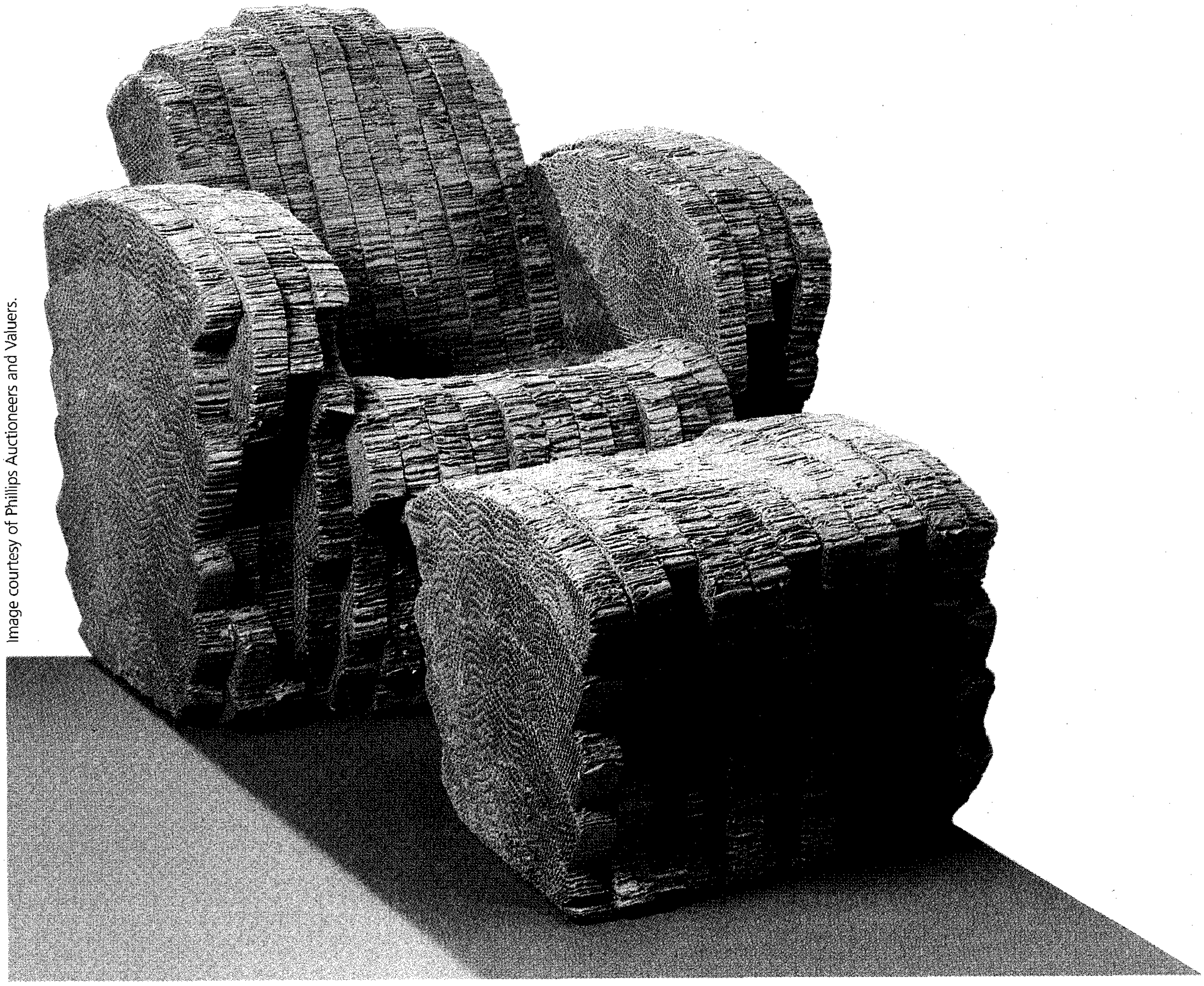
THE CIDER HOUSE RULES
The director Lasse Hallström has come to specialize in grownup movies about kids and teen-agers, especially of the luckless variety. This new picture, adapted by John Irving from his own novel, teems with scores of the little beggars; the tale begins at a snowbound orphanage in Maine, where Dr. Larch (Michael Caine) tends to the bodies and souls of the unwanted, even extending his skills to an illegal abortion practice. His protégé is Homer Wells (Tobey Maguire), who is set to follow in Larch's footsteps until those of Candy (Charlize Theron) appear. Homer departs for the wide world, where he learns about apples and sex, in that order. As an older and wiser man he returns to his destiny, although the getting of that wisdom has been oddly unengaging. The orphan scenes have an imaginative solidity that fades as the film proceeds, and you can't work out whether the gruelling social issues, like incest and abortion, are the subject of the movie or simply ballast. As apple movies go, this one lacks a core.—*Anthony Lane* (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

ERIN BROCKOVICH
This upbeat, inspirational melodrama, based on a true story and directed by Steven Soderbergh, is brought to life by a star on a heavenly rampage. Julia Roberts swings into rooms, ablaze with indignation, her breasts bulging out of her skimpy tops, and rants at the people gaping at her. She's a moral heroine with no sense of propriety—Ralph Nader crossed with Jesse Ventura. Like "A Civil Action" and "The Insider," the movie exposes corporate malfeasance—in this case, that of Pacific Gas & Electric, which, for years, dumped a lethal chemical called Chromium 6 at its plant in Hinkley, California; the families who lived nearby were diagnosed with multiple cancers. Brockovich, a legal secretary without formal training, leads the charge against the utility corporation, supported by a phlegmatic middle-aged lawyer (Albert Finney) and by her lover (Aaron Eckhart), a hippie-biker dreamboat, bearded but beerless, who takes care of Erin's children while she's out haranguing everybody. Soderbergh's direction goes straight as an arrow, and the movie, though obvious, crude, and even bullying, is raffishly enjoyable and touching.—*D.D.* (3/27/00) (42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

GHOST DOG: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI
Part satire, part comic book, Jim Jarmusch's new film is set in a future that's one beat beyond the present and takes place in a generic cityscape called the Industrialized State. Forest Whitaker stars as a hulking, dangerous, yet curiously gentle samurai known as Ghost Dog. He follows the austere precepts of the samurai code but is also partial to gangsta rap and high-tech weaponry. His master is an Italian mob underling who serves a family in hilarious decline: they operate out of the back of a Chinese restaurant and cannot make the rent on their social club. Jarmusch keeps the camera moving slowly, attending to details, and the rap soundtrack by RZA (of Wu-Tang Clan fame) gives the whole undertaking a fuguelike quality. When the movie becomes a showdown between two ancient codes—the samurai and *omertà*—Jarmusch playfully aligns the pretend violence of cartoons with the stylized violence of Hollywood, leading to an enigmatic ending that is thoroughly unnerving. It's like an elaborate joke without a punch line. The setup, though, is worth it, thanks to Whitaker's quiet, powerful performance; in Jarmusch's hands he becomes a beacon of purity in a collapsing world.—*Michael Agger* (Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, and 42nd Street E Walk.)

MISSION TO MARS
The last two Martian sorties, courtesy of NASA, have been embarrassing failures, and so is Brian De Palma's first leap into outer space. The film involves two missions: one, led by Luke Graham (Don Cheadle), runs into trouble with an angry sandstorm, whereupon another crew—played by Tim Robbins, Connie Nielsen, Gary Sinise, and Jerry O'Connell—is dispatched to sort out the mess. What promised to be a semi-respectable missing-in-action flick suddenly turns into a hallucinogenic exploration of our earthly, mortal ex-

This should put you at ease with the internet.



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istence; and poor Gary Sinise, who did such sterling work in bringing his imperilled colleagues back to Earth in "Apollo 13," is now obliged to take permanent leave of his senses. The movie is weakly written, sluggishly paced, and performed without gusto; it also happens to be beautifully shot, but the elegance of the camera movements is the only evidence that there used to be intelligent life in Brian De Palma films.—*A.L.* (3/20/00) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Olympia I and II.)

THE NINTH GATE
Roman Polanski's sinister addiction to all things devilish continues unabated. This time, he casts Johnny Depp as a New York dealer in rare books, who is hired by a wealthy collector (Frank Langella) to track down the missing copy of a notorious text. Some of the illustrations were apparently drawn by Lucifer himself; one can see how this might increase the market value. The quest takes Depp to Europe, where the mildewed paraphernalia of creaking doors, leather bindings, and candlelit rituals seems marginally less absurd. Other characters flit like bats through the action; Lena Olin is a tattooed widow, while Emmanuelle Seigner is a green-eyed angel who floats down Parisian steps almost as sweetly as Fred Astaire in "Funny Face." The early scenes of the picture are crisp and disturbing, but, as with "Bitter Moon," Polanski's spritely sense of humor seems to flicker and fade, and you get the awful feeling that he believes in the meaningless apocalypse of his finale. Evil deserves better than this.—*A.L.* (3/20/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

NOT ONE LESS
In a rural Chinese village, a thirteen-year-old student (Wei Minzhi) becomes an emergency substitute teacher. When one of her charges, a ten-year-old boy, leaves to find work in a vast, nameless city nearby, she abandons her post, and sets out to find him. The great Chinese director Zhang Yimou shot this film in a style that might be called austere fabulism. He uses documentary techniques—casting nonactors and presenting the raw concrete walls and dirt roads in all their authentic ugliness. Yet the story is shaped like a fable from the silent-film days, and one gets caught up in it. It becomes a slow-motion chase movie, and the persistence of the young teacher gives the film a tone of hilarious monomania. Intentionally or not (it's hard for an outsider to tell), Zhang reveals the meanness and impersonality of contemporary Chinese society.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

ROMEO MUST DIE
Thankfully, we are spared the spectacle of Jet Li whispering sonnets in the moonlight; this film goes nowhere near Shakespeare. It's a slick package of rap music and roundhouse kicks designed to establish Li, already a Hong Kong box-office phenomenon, as the Fred Astaire of fisticuffs. Adhering to a time-honored kung-fu-film tradition, the earnest dialogue and overloaded plot serve only as filler to be endured before the next fight sequence begins. (If you must know: the plot involves two gangs, one Asian, one black, who duke it out on the Oakland waterfront.) Li is a graceful, smooth, and creative performer; a scene in which he destroys five prison guards while blindfolded and suspended by one leg is jaw-dropping. In another, he uses black plastic pull-ties to neutralize a troop of thugs—who knew that hardware stores provided such terrific weaponry? Director Andrzej Bartkowiak adds an inspired touch by showing each of Li's death blows as a slow-motion color X-ray; the anatomically curious can count each vertebra as it is broken in half.—*M.A.* (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

LE SAMOURAÏ
In Jean-Pierre Melville's 1967 film, the coolest, sleekest, and most influential salute to the hard-working professionals of the French underworld, Alain Delon plays a hit man who dodges the minions of a double-crossing employer, as well as the police, after murdering a night-club boss. Until the final melancholy twist, Melville uses Delon's daggerlike pretty-boy looks to sustain an air of menacing ambiguity. Although the antihero has a faithful moll (Nathalie Delon) and a thing for the night club's alluring pianist (Cathy Rosier), his attachments are all business, and the writer-director doesn't try to humanize him. He doesn't have to: he banks on our empathizing with Delon's loner as he outmaneuvers the inspector on his case (François Périer). The filmmaker's precision craftsmanship triumphs in a chase through the Métro. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; March 31 and April 1.)

THE SIXTH SENSE
A delicate, emotionally attentive, but very scary ghost story. In a Philadelphia drained of color and life, a shrink (Bruce Willis) who specializes in childhood anxieties becomes obsessed with one of his patients, a suffering nine-year-old boy (Haley Joel Osment) who "sees" dead people. The movie, written and directed by the young, Indian-born M. Night Shyamalan, consists mostly of long conversations between Willis, who is usually silent and very patient, and Osment, who may be an acting genius. Despite an occasional hackneyed moment, the movie is an admirable attempt at injecting some honest feeling into a curdled commercial genre, and it pays off in the end with a genuine shock that leaves one amazed.—D.D. (8/23-30/99) (Criterion Center, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

SPECTRES OF THE SPECTRUM
Watching Craig Baldwin's new film, an eighty-four-minute diatribe against the standardization of the electromagnetic spectrum, is like flying into a pop-culture black hole: time and space are bent, reality is distorted, and you are crushed mercilessly by its referential excess. Baldwin has taken the detritus of the last fifty years of visual culture—kinescopes, instructional videos, B-movie clips, filmstrips, newscasts—and produced a paranoid fable about how the democratic promise of electricity has been co-opted by media conglomerates who use the "spectrum" to flatten the minds of the masses. A father and daughter, "media pirates" who live in an Airstream trailer located in the Nevada desert, serve as our heroes. Booboo, the daughter, discovers that the secret to saving the Earth from media enslavement might be encoded in an old broadcast of "Science in Action," a fifties TV show on which her grandmother appeared. She heads into outer space to surf the spectrum, where she encounters a fusillade of images that impart a quasi-history of radio, television, mesmerism, RCA, sunspots, the Edison labs—a sort of manic crib sheet of technological history. The film will also be screened as part of the Whitney Museum's 2000 Biennial Exhibition.—*M.A.* (Cinema Village.)

TOPSY-TURVY
Mike Leigh's brilliant re-creation of the most famous partnership in the British theatre—the collaboration of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the glory era of imperial rule. There are elements here of a traditional bio-pic—failure, triumph, intimations of immortality—but none of the stodginess and self-congratulation that usually plague the form. Sullivan (Allan Corduner), a libertine who nevertheless had serious pretensions as a composer, and Gilbert (Jim Broadbent), formal, irascible, and asexual, but a great theatrical pro, are so dissimilar in temperament that they can hardly bear each other's company. Leigh suggests that the combination of sentimental languor and incisiveness produced the art of "The Mikado," whose preparation and first performance take up the second half of the movie. The authentic period stage lighting produces a glow on the painted faces; the fragile beauty of Sullivan's tunes is piercing when they are played, as they are here, at slower tempos than we are used to hearing. In all, one of the greatest movies about the theatre. With Lesley Manville, Timothy Spall, Ron Cook, and Wendy Nottingham.—*D.D.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

WAKING THE DEAD
This earnest romantic movie is sombre and a little gummy, but it holds your attention and the actors gain your sympathy. In the early seventies, Fielding Pierce (Billy Crudup), a Harvard boy in search of a political career, falls in love with a humorlessly dedicated left-wing activist, Sarah Williams (Jennifer Connelly). When she's killed in a terrorist attack while helping refugees from Chile, he goes numb with grief. A decade later, he's running for Congress, still frozen and sad. In the midst of his campaign, he sees Sarah's ghost or her shadow—he definitely sees *something*—and falls apart. For some of us, Sarah was never really the right girl for Fielding, but he doesn't think so, and the movie is a decent attempt to plumb a romantic obsession. The soulful, dark-eyed Connelly is a little thick-tongued; she swallows some of her most important lines. But Crudup goes back and forth between deep reserve and a slightly hysterical emotionalism with impressive skill. Directed with almost too much sensitivity by Keith Gordon. Based on Scott Spencer's novel.—*D.D.* (3/27/00) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

THE WHOLE NINE YARDS
Matthew Perry, who is sometimes the only thing that keeps "Friends" on its toes, attempts yet another leap to the big screen. He plays a Montreal dentist whose next-door neighbor (Bruce Willis) turns out to be a hit man hiding from the Mob. Throw in a deep-voiced heavy (Michael Clarke Duncan) and a couple of fiercely disappointed wives (Rosanna Arquette and Natasha Henstridge), and soon everyone wants to kill somebody else. Perry and Willis—the scared and the smooth—are not a bad pairing, and Perry gets the chance for some jerky slapstick (he bounces off Clarke Duncan as if off a vast rubber wall), but the film is too hectic and scattershot to give the actors much room. Visually, this may be the dingiest film of the year so far, although Amanda Peet, in her role as a death-crazed dental assistant, cheers things up considerably. The director is Jonathan Lynn, who doesn't quite have the courage to carry off this black comedy; the mood of loving contentment which triumphs at the end feels like an insult.—*A.L.* (3/6/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Coronet Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, State, and Union Square.)

WONDER BOYS
A pleasant dud from director Curtis Hanson and screenwriter Steve Kloves. Michael Douglas plays Grady Tripp, pothead campus novelist and hero to undergraduates, who cannot finish his new book and gets drawn into all kinds of social complications. Douglas gives a surprisingly mild and rueful performance, but the movie has very little dramatic interest and quickly slides into whimsy. The vibrant Frances McDormand is the university's chancellor, with whom Tripp is having an affair; Tobey Maguire is a maddeningly elusive writing student who may or may not have talent; and Robert Downey, Jr., drifting through a fey, meaningless performance, is a visiting New York book editor. "Wonder Boys" isn't sloppy; it's been made with love, but one looks at it in bewilderment, amazed that so much care has been taken with desultory material that seems all wrong for the movies. Adapted from Michael Chabon's novel.—*D.D.* (2/21-28/00) (Art Greenwich Twin, Coronet Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and State.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (11/22/99)
Angelika Film Center, Cinema 3rd Avenue, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE
Quad Cinema.

FINAL DESTINATION
Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, Union Square, and Waverly.

HERE ON EARTH
Chelsea Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas.

THE HURRICANE (1/10/00)
Criterion Center and Union Square.
THE INSIDER (11/8/99)
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Criterion Center, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Union Square.
MIFUNE
Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
THE NEXT BEST THING
Art Greenwich Twin, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and 19th Street East 6.
THE STRAIGHT STORY (11/1/99)
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.
SWEET AND LOWDOWN (12/6/99)
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Quad Cinema, and Union Square.
TRASH
Quad Cinema.
WHAT PLANET ARE YOU FROM? (3/13/00)
Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, State, and Union Square.
WHATEVER IT TAKES
Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas.
WINTER SLEEPERS
Angelika Film Center, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

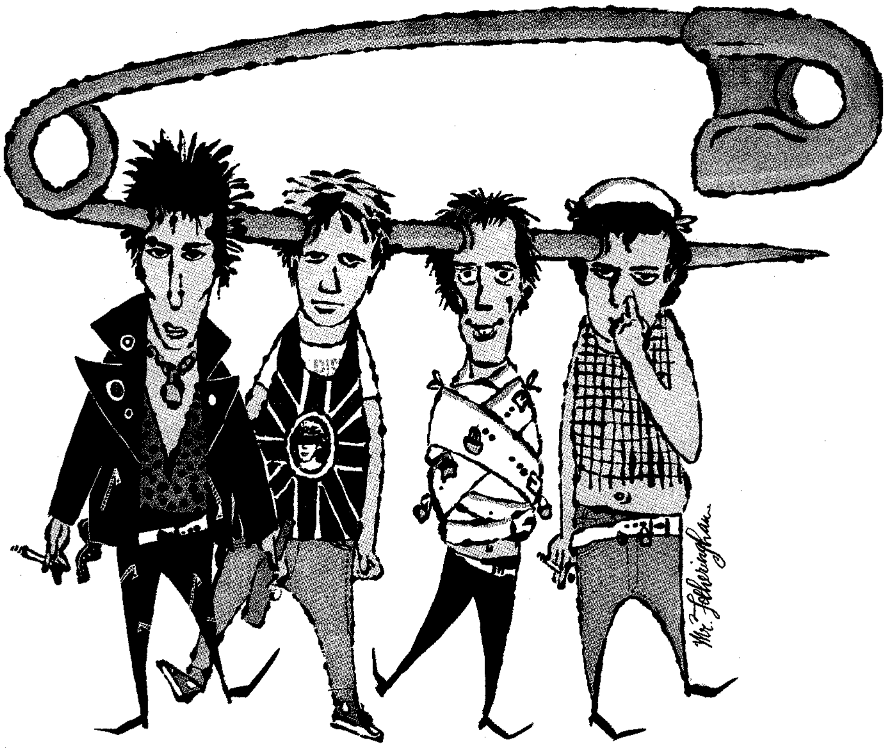
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

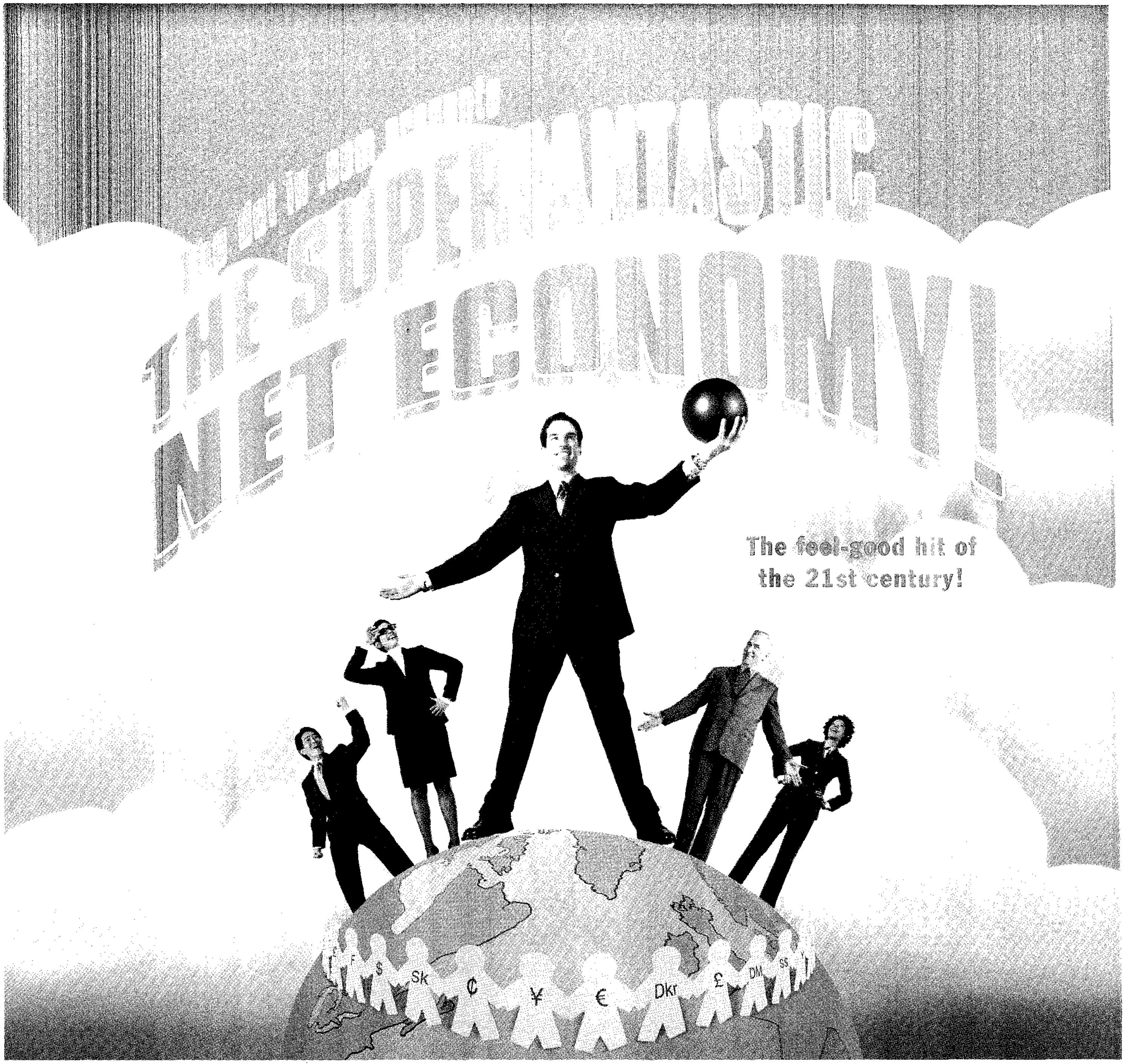
Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077) "Visions and Modernity: The Films of Fritz Lang." Restored prints of Lang's masterpieces, with live music by Donald Sosin. April 1 at 2: "Metropolis" (1926). ♦ April 1 at 5: "You Only Live Once" (1937). ♦ April 2 at 2: "Spies" (1928).
ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—March 30 at 8, April 1 at 5 and 7, and April 2 at 6: "Papa's Song" (1999, Sander Francken; in Dutch). ♦ March 31 at 7:30 and 9:30, April 1 at 3:30 and 10, and April 2 at 3:30 and 8: "Divine Trash" (1998, Steve Yeager), a documentary about the early career of John Waters. ♦ Restored prints of Fritz Lang's films, shown in conjunction with the American Museum of the Moving Image. April 1 at 6: "Destiny" (1921). ♦ April 1 at 8: "Fury" (1936).
BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—March 29: "Pandora's Box" (1929, George W. Pabst). ♦ March 30-31 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Les Amants du Pont Neuf" (1991, Leos Carax; in French). ♦ April 1 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Burden of Dreams" (1982, Les Blank). ♦ April 2 at 2, 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Cobra Verde" (1988, Werner Herzog). ♦ April 3 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Faust" (1994, Jan Svankmajer; in Czech). ♦ April 4 at 7 and 9:30: "Force of Evil" (1948, Abraham Polonsky).
FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through April 6: The "Neo-Noir" festival. March 29-30: "Fargo" (1996, Joel Coen) and "A Simple Plan" (1998, Sam Raimi). ♦ March 31 and April 1: "Point Blank" (1967, John Boorman) and "Le Samouraï" (†). ♦ April 2: "Chinatown" (1974, Roman Polanski). ♦ April 3-4: "Get Carter" (1970, Mike Hodges) and "Stormy Monday" (1988, Mike Figgis).
MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The "New Directors/New Films" festival. March 29 at 6 and March 30 at 9: "Journey to the Sun" (1999, Yesim Ustaoglu; in Turkish). ♦ March 29 at 9 and March 31 at 6: "Northern Skirts" (1999, Barbara Alpert; in German). ♦ March 30 at 6 and April 1 at 12: "Shower" (1999, Zhang Yang; in Mandarin). ♦ March 31 at 9 and April 2 at noon: "The Eyes of Tammy Faye" (1999, Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato) and "In God We Trust" (1999, Jason Reitman). ♦ April 1 at 3 and April 2 at 6: "El Medina" (1999, Yousry Nasrallah; in Egyptian). ♦ April 1 at 6 and April 2 at 9: "Le Bleu des Villes" (1999, Stéphane Brizé; in French). ♦ April 1 at 9 and April 2 at 3: "Two Women" (1999, Tahmine Milani; in Persian). ♦ April 3 at 6 and April 4 at 9: "Martin" (1999, Joan Stein). ♦ April 3 at 8:30 and April 4 at 6: "Crane World" (1999, Pablo Trapero; in Spanish).



Opening March 29 at Film Forum, "The Filth and the Fury," Julien Temple's second documentary about the seminal British punk band the Sex Pistols.

PIONEER THEATRE
155 E. 3rd St., at Ave. A. (254-3300)—March 29 at 8 and March 31 at 8: "Nightclubbing: Modern Music," footage of vintage live rock shows. ♦ March 29-April 6: "The Lifestyle" (2000, David Schisgall).
THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—The films of James Toback. March 31: "The Gambler" (1975, Karel Reisz; written by Toback). ♦ April 1: "Fingers" (1977). ♦ April 2: "The Big Bang" (1989). ♦ April 3: "Exposed" (1983). ♦ April 4: "The Pick-Up Artist" (1987).
SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway (864-1414)—Through April 25: A retrospective of the films of John Waters and Pedro Almodóvar. April 4 at 7: "Divine Trash" (1998, Steve Yeager), a documentary about John Waters. ♦ March 28 at 8:45: "Pink Flamingos" (1991, Waters).
WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Through April 6: "Fragments * Jerusalem," a film by Ron Havilio documenting two hundred years of his family's history in Jerusalem. Shown in two sessions. March 29 at 7:45, March 30 at 1, March 31 at 4, April 1 at 5, and April 2 at 7: Parts 1-3. ♦ March 29 at 4, March 30 at 4:15, March 31 at 7:15, April 1 at 8:15, and April 4 at 1: Parts 4-7.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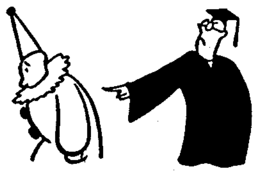
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

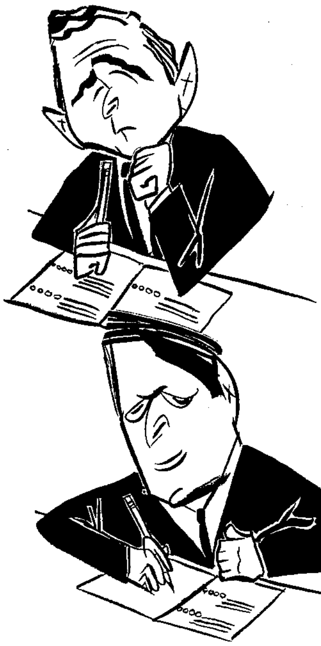
COMMENT
THE DECLINING SIGNIFICANCE OF GRADES



Now that the Washington *Post* has published Al Gore's S.A.T. scores and Harvard transcript, we've got a complete set of private late-adolescent educational data on our Presidential candidates. This is a first, and it's not likely to be a last. The S.A.T. has become such a fetish—at least in coastal, metropolitan, upper-middle-class America—that evidently it has found itself a place on the list of things that we absolutely must know about candidates before casting our Presidential votes. It isn't just the specific activities of reporters for the *Post*, *The New Yorker* (which a few months ago revealed George W. Bush's scores and transcript), and *Slate* (which in January revealed Bill Bradley's scores), along with whatever gremlins inside the universities are helping them, that are responsible for bringing this information to light. It's the unstoppable collective will of the national mandarinate. Maybe we should just go ahead and put an S.A.T.-score box on the financial-disclosure forms.

The most jarring note in these revelations, however, wasn't the candidates' scores but their grades. Gore and Bush, it turns out, made a lot of C's. Today, there are hardly any C students at Ivy League colleges, thanks to an intervening generation of rampant grade inflation. Princeton conducted a study two years ago which showed that eighty-three per cent of the grades given to undergraduates are A's and B's; the present-day equivalent of the gentleman's C is the gentleman's B-plus. The ironies here are so abundant that every time I try to count them I run out of fingers.

Bush and Gore were in college at the end of an era during which grades had served two different purposes at two different kinds of universities. Most public universities had minimal admissions requirements. The freshman year was a kind of audition, during which a lot of the students would be weeded out, depending, largely, on their grades. Has a relative ever told you a story in which a professor says, on the first day of class, "Look to the left of you. Look to the right of you. One of those people won't be here next year"? Open admissions is what that story is about. And, among the freshmen who managed to stay on, relatively few finished their degree on time: of those who entered Berkeley in 1955, when it was already one of the world's great universities, one fifth didn't return for their sophomore year, and only half had graduated by 1965.



George W. Bush and Al Gore

The Ivy League colleges, on the other hand, still had a finishing-school quality. It was assumed that the students were there for a final buffing and polishing of their minds and spirits, not to launch their careers. There wasn't much harm in bad grades, because it was easy to get into professional school and a job was always waiting at Father's company, and there was some good in them, because C's built character.

The original purpose of S.A.T. scores, which generated a numerical prediction of each applicant's freshman-year grades, was to provide Ivy League schools with a means to open their doors to the brightest students from all over the country. But once the Ivy League was no longer filled with private-school lads from privileged backgrounds (like Bush and Gore), the level of concern about career prospects

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

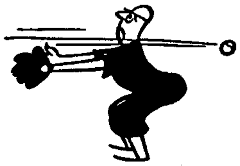
went *way* up. The new students had got straight A's in a public high school, had won out in an ever more ferocious competition to get into an élite college, and didn't have jobs waiting for them, especially since admission to professional school had become more competitive, too. The gentleman's C, if you weren't a gentleman, seemed to have the potential to ruin your life. What professor had the heart to keep giving it? Anyway, all through this period, the American professoriat was pursuing the dream of Germanizing itself—of becoming a class of Herr Doktor Professors who conducted research, instead of a bunch of overworked Mr. Chipses who taught. Faculties were not inclined to fight for the right to spend lots of time grading toughly. State universities, for their part, moved the audition process up, and began using the S.A.T. to select high-school seniors, rather than to eliminate college freshmen. As a result, admission became almost a guarantee of graduation, as it had always been at the Ivy League schools. Professors, again, were all for this.

The more deeply grade inflation sets in, the less grades matter. Once everybody has a better-than-3.0 average, grades have been factored out. And that means that the S.A.T., supposedly a mere tool for predicting grades, has superseded them in importance. At Harvard, in the three decades since Gore graduated, the dean would every so often send a stern letter to faculty members urging them to fight fiercely against grade inflation. Grades would briefly fall, then drift back up. Meanwhile, the admissions office was finding that both high-school grades (also inflating) and S.A.T. scores (which vary more than grades do) were becoming less helpful; for years, standardized achievement and advanced-placement tests have better predicted applicants' freshman grades. In response, Harvard privately considered dropping the S.A.T. as an admissions requirement, before deciding not to.

So why are we interested in middle-aged men's S.A.T. scores? Because we think the S.A.T. is something like an I.Q. test (the *Post* also published Gore's I.Q., by the way), and we think I.Q. tests measure what you are. Grades, by comparison, are a record of something you did. High ones can play negatively, low ones can play positively (like John McCain's raffish C's and D's at Annapolis), or vice versa, because the meaning of a deed is open to varying interpretation. S.A.T.s sit there for decades, stolid and immovable. They take us into a world of innate worth. The selection of a President—all of American life, for that matter—ought to be a covenant of deeds. We'll have better Presidents a generation from now if we bring back grades.

—*Nicholas Lemann*

BLUEGRASS BASEBALL
THE METS AND YANKEES STRIKE A SWEET CHORD

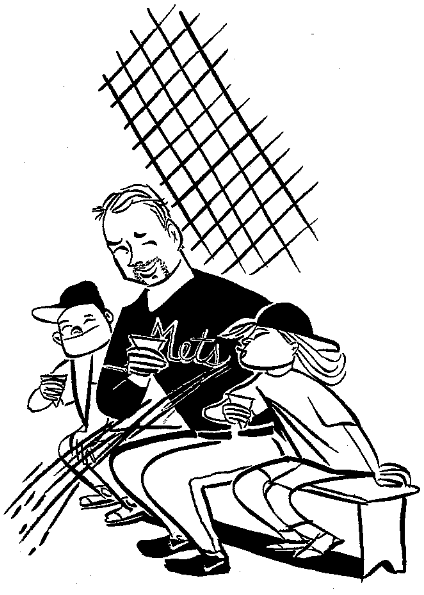


The Mets and the Cubs open the baseball season this week with a couple of games in Japan, of all places. Little remains of spring training beyond the fleeting bygone moment—supplied this time by a couple of country-music stars. Willie Nelson, invited to sing the anthem before a Yankees-Indians afternoon game in Tampa, turned up in the Yanks' clubhouse at Legends Field a few minutes before game time and sat down with star center fielder Bernie Williams, who plays guitar when he isn't running down line drives or turning on inside fastballs. Williams is an eclectic, capable of the bluegrass riff or a sensitive rendering of Rodrigo's "Fantasía para un Gentilhombre," and in no time he and Nelson, seated on locker-room chairs, were passing Bernie's guitar back and forth, with nearly the full roster clustered around and goggling. Willie, wearing his customary beat-up jeans and whiskery smile, kept fingering air while Bernie watched intently, then worked out the notes on the frets of his Ovation Adamas. "That's it!" Willie said as the thrumming chord took wing. "You got it right there, man!" Then he borrowed the guitar back and floated the same notes once again, *con Okie.*

Into the clubhouse at this instant came a young stranger carrying a Montreal equipment bag: Ted Lilly, the left-hander just acquired from the Expos as the last piece of the trade that sent Hideki Irabu to the Expos this year. Lilly stopped in his tracks, struck dumb by the tableau: Willie Nelson pickin' for the World Champion Yankees in their locker room?

"Welcome to the Show," somebody said.

Over at the Mets' camp in Port St. Lucie, on the opposite coast, the celebrity visitor was the hugely popular country singer Garth Brooks (a.k.a. the rocker Chris Gaines), who came every day, wore a full Mets uniform, with an honorary "1" on the back, and worked out full time with the club, shagging flies, taking batting practice, and getting into late innings of a few games as a backup left fielder. This was a deal with the Mets front office, allowing the gray-haired Brooks (he is thirty-eight) to get in some dream time while drawing attention to his Touch'em All Foundation, which solicits pledges from major leaguers for children's causes, and expects to pick up at least four million dollars by this route over the current season. More than a hundred players (including thirteen Mets) are participants, and will contribute sums in accord with their home runs or batters-struck-out or other statistics, with further sums arriving via corporate and celebrity matching funds.



Garth Brooks

Every time you saw Brooks at the Mets complex, he was sweating. He never played the crowd, never looked like anything but an earnest, semi-clunky outsider dying for a base hit. He went through a similar spring season with the San Diego Padres last year, in Arizona, but he couldn't hit there, either; his cumulative one for thirty-nine at the plate with the two clubs comes out to .026. Brooks played high-school ball back home in Yukon, Oklahoma, but took a track scholarship to Oklahoma State, where he was a javelin chucker. Why not baseball? "Oh, no," he said to the question. "The ballplayers were like *gods* there."

What Brooks is good at is kids. After morning practice one day, he sat in the tiny B-field dugout, with a chubby boy on his right and a girl with blond bangs and a turned-around baseball cap on his left, teaching them how to spit. The kids were about ten, and each wore a T-shirt identifying them as part of a visiting group of juvenile long-term patients. Brooks had his hat off, revealing a pale high forehead above his tanned face. What he wanted his rookies to pick up was the way a cocky young ballplayer handles a picnic-size paper cup full of water or Gatorade just after he's come off the field and plumped onto the bench.

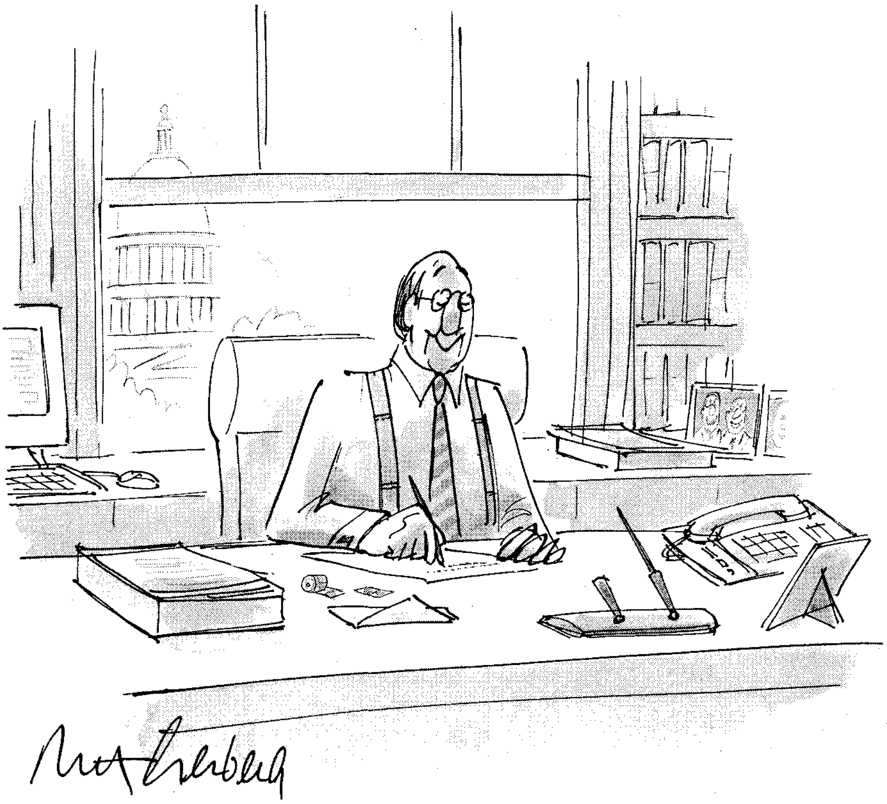
"Drink some but not all—O.K.?" he said. "Don't swallow all of it, either. Now spit out what you've got left onto the ground. Just let her fly." He spat out a stream, and the blond girl, squeezing her eyes shut with effort, almost matched him.

"Not bad," he said. "But wait, you've still got some water in that cup, don't forget. Now you're gonna fling that away and then spin the cup away onto the ground. Fling and spin."

He demonstrated, to loud laughter—there were rows of rapt fans along a chain-link fence just behind the bench—but the girl's fling, it must be admitted, looked more like a pour.

"Good, but you want to *slice* it," Brooks said. "Here, let me get you some more water."

This time, the girl sent a terrific backhand slash of water onto the dirt but hesitated with her spin. Brooks, noticing that her fingers might be too small to twirl the cup away, helped her take it in both hands and demonstrated the countering motions that would get the job done. "Go ahead," he said. "We're looking for a record here."



"Dear J.J.: Thank you so much for your lovely present of fourteen million dollars for my campaign. It was sweet of you to remember. I promise to spend it on something nice."

• •

Away went the cup, spinning like a top across the littered dugout floor, as we all cheered. "Outstanding," Brooks said. "You just made the team."

—*Roger Angell*

INK
WHAT'S IN A DOMAIN NAME?

"Who steals my purse steals trash," Iago claims. "But he that filches from me my good name / Robs me of that which not enriches him, / And makes me poor indeed." I'm not sure it was robbery (the filcher did pay), but it was definitely my name: julianbarnes.com, not to mention julianbarnes.org and julianbarnes.net—all snaffled by a cybersquatter in the last few weeks. And not just me: the fellow has hoovered up the dot-coms of vsnaipaul, fayweldon, jungchang, germainegreer, ianmcewan, martinamis, and louisdebernieres. Some Americans, too: dondelillo, alicewalker, martincruzsmith, davasobel. A hundred and thirty-two by the final count. The fact that many such names should still be available isn't much of a surprise—the speedy joust of E-commerce is temperamentally far from the slow ragout of bookmaking—but the identity of the squatter was. He turned out to be Dr. Mark Hogarth, a research fellow in the history and philosophy of science at Cambridge. Hogarth is evidently better paid than Iago: at a hundred and five dollars to register each writer, his purse has been trashed to the tune of nearly fourteen thousand dollars.

At first, I was faintly irritated (hey, that's *my* name) and faintly flattered. Perhaps the guy was an E-version of Rolland Comstock, a Springfield, Missouri, lawyer who for decades has been collecting and warehousing modern first editions, plus ephemera, arcana, curiosa, and marginalia, on an obsessive, industrial scale. All for passion, not profit: the man even buys up hundreds of remainder copies when it offends him that an admired book should be thus downgraded. Perhaps, I thought, acquiring domain names was like collecting wine labels, a private if peculiar homage to something enjoyed.

And, if I didn't really believe that, I vaguely imagined that what we loosely call "literary values" still linger on in this new E-territory. For instance, my current Web site (www.jbarnes.com, if you're interested) is tended by a librarian in Illinois who actually forks out some of his own money to have advertising strips removed from the screen. But the British philosopher is somewhat less noble. He is now holding an on-line auction of all the names he owns; the lucky buyers will then, he judges, set up individual sites to sell each writer's books on commission. "Robs me of that which not enriches him"—uh-huh. And in the meanwhile Dr. Hogarth invites me to buy back my own name. His fee: three per cent of the cover price of all my books sold, worldwide, in any language, in 1998. Assuming that a writer's royalty, over a range of contracts, might average out at about nine per cent, he's asking me for a third of that year's income, the same amount that I handed over in taxes to the British government, which does at least mend the roads and bomb distant nations on my behalf.

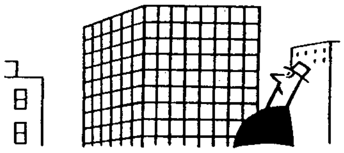
But it wasn't the grotesque profit expectation that stirred my more atavistic feelings. It was a photograph of Dr. Hogarth in a British newspaper. Not his physiognomy (we know that the reading of mug shots alters entirely with the context) but the background. Behind him were four well-stocked shelves of books: all seemingly in prime condition, ordered, respected, honored. These were the books that helped him work; behind the books, their authors. No doubt there are more things dreamed of in Dr. Hogarth's philosophy than in mine. And mine, increasingly, boiled down to this: Hey, no, that's *my* name. That's what it says on my spines. Books are but words, yet those are two of the most charged and indicative. They're also the last ones I insert into my typescript. Text, dedication, title, author: that's how I do it, ritualistically. Those two words are me. They're proof that I do such things.

First you lowercase me, then you sell me. "And makes me poor indeed"—on the nose again, Shakespeare. And I don't think he would have paid up, either.

—Julian Barnes

DEPT. OF IMMORTALITY

DID MOSES SUPPOSE THAT HIS COLISEUM WOULD LAST?



Like the rest of New York, Robert Caro has been anticipating for quite some time the demolition of the Coliseum that Robert Moses built on Columbus Circle. Still, when he saw cranes punch an enormous hole in the front of the building the other day, he found himself, he confessed, strangely moved by the spectacle.

Caro is currently immersed in the third volume of his biography of Lyndon Johnson, which he has been working on ever since he finished his Robert Moses biography, "The Power Broker," more than a quarter century ago. He does his writing on a battered Smith-Corona, in a spartan one-room office on West Fifty-seventh Street. Tacked up on the wall behind his desk is a detailed outline of the book. If he gets up from his desk and walks to the window, he can watch the wrecking cranes a block away, something he has been drawn to do a lot in recent days.

"Sometimes when you're writing, you think, What is this compared with that?" he said one morning last week, gesturing out the window to what used to be the Coliseum. "Moses built in concrete and steel, and he felt that concrete and steel would endure. And you'd say to yourself, 'I guess it's going to, because that is just the ugliest, most arrogant building, and there it is.' "

The Coliseum on Columbus Circle is hardly the Colosseum in Rome, yet its fall, if not exactly tragic, has a certain moral gravity. Opened in 1956, the exhibition hall cum office tower is among the last buildings that Robert Moses completed and now is the first to be demolished. Like so many of his monumental works, it was conceived on a scale that makes the ambitions of Donald Trump seem genteel. To make space for his gigantic brick box, Moses condemned thirty buildings and permanently rerouted midtown traffic. "He named it the Coliseum," Caro observed. "The Caesars of Rome are immortal, and he wanted to be remembered that way, too."

The building is coming down not because of its ugliness, or its arrogance, but simply because the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which owns it, wanted to sell the land it sits on. Developers, who are planning to build a new headquarters for A.O.L.-Time Warner, along with a Mandarin Oriental Hotel and a concert hall for Jazz at Lincoln Center, paid around three hundred and forty-five million dollars for the site two years ago. Tellingly, though, during the fourteen-year battle over the future of Columbus Circle, almost no one was willing to come forward and argue publicly that the Coliseum was worth preserving.

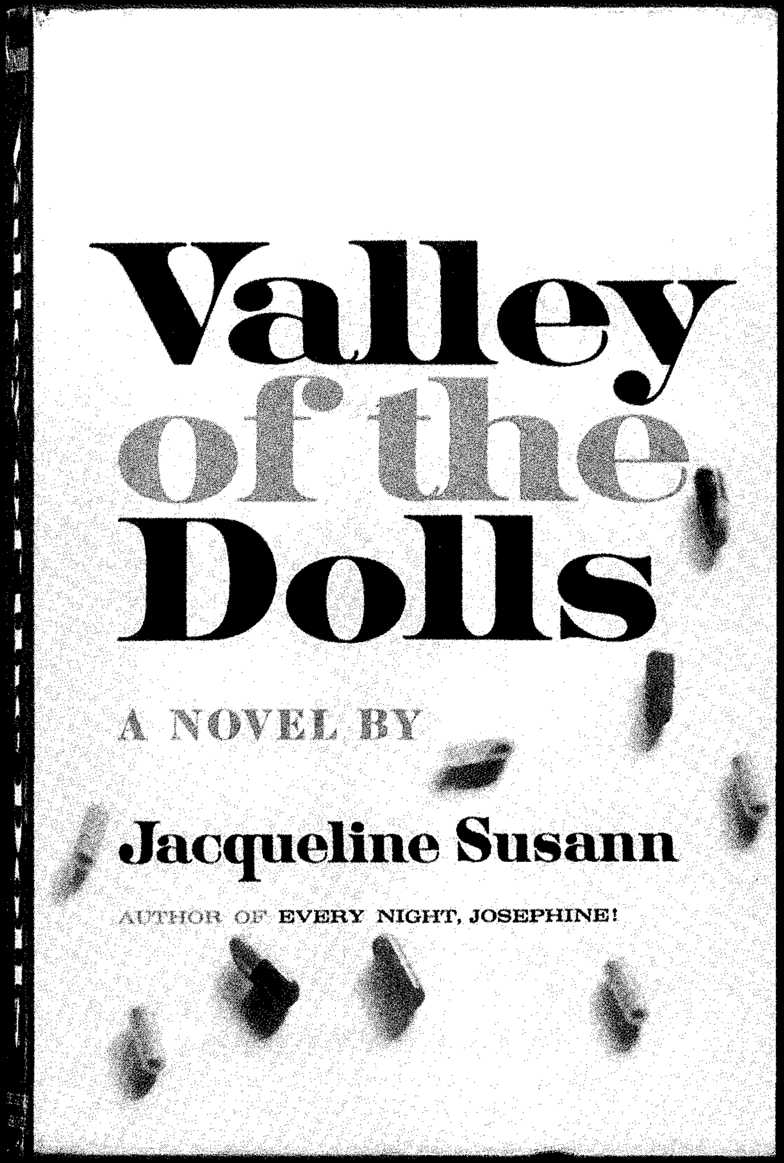
"The Power Broker" is now more than half the age of the Coliseum. In twenty-six years, it has been through twenty-seven printings, and, although it has never been a best-seller, it has long outlasted the predictions of its subject. Moses, who died in 1981, did his best to thwart the book before its publication and, afterward, to belittle it. "I doubt that many well-heeled readers will fork out $17.95 . . . to read the unexpurgated Caro," he stated in a thirty-five-page 1974 press release. He was fond of telling associates, "It will disappear before you know it."

Caro has kept a lot of these insults in a scrapbook, and, reflecting on the ruin of the Coliseum, he seems caught between philosophical reverie on the one hand and an understandable Schadenfreude on the other. One moment, he invoked Shelley's "Ozymandias," and the next he seemed not without hope. "When the Coliseum started to come down, I found myself thinking about immortality and what endures," he said. "And what I thought is, To endure, you've got to do something that's right.

"That's going down," he added, "but 'The Power Broker' is having another printing."

—Elizabeth Kolbert

Nov. 28, 1970. Confiscated while passing to girlfriend in study hall.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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

WHY WON'T ANYONE PULL THE PLUG ON UPN?

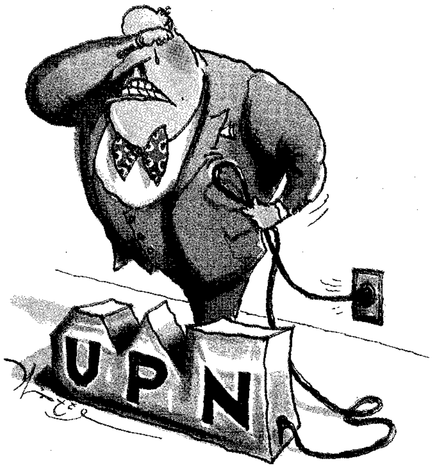
The conventional picture of the American economy is of an irresistible force of creative destruction, meting out swift and severe justice to unprofitable businesses. If the suits in corporate accounting learn that you didn't make last quarter's projections, your division is scratched off the organization chart, right? But that isn't really how things work. More often than not, companies and divisions are kept afloat long after they've stopped creating value and started destroying it. Plenty of businesses exist only—well, because they exist. Call it the allure of persistence.

Consider UPN, a national broadcast-TV network that Chris-Craft and Viacom started five years ago. Last week, Viacom offered to sell its half to Chris-Craft for five million dollars (or, alternatively, to buy out Chris-Craft's stake). For the price of a classic seven on Central Park West, then, Chris-Craft could have had full title to a TV network with more than a hundred affiliate stations. But it said no. And it made the right decision.

Since UPN went on the air, in 1995, it has given the world such shows as "The Watcher" (featuring the rapper Sir-Mix-a-Lot as a Good Samaritan with E.S.P.), "Seven Days" (cocky ex-C.I.A. agent uses secret spherical device to travel back in time), and "Monster Trux 2000" (gigantic vehicles careen wildly on a racetrack). Along the way, UPN has racked up more than eight hundred million dollars in losses. That's a lot of red ink, and there's no reason to think the future will look any different. So will UPN be put out of its misery? Not a chance. Viacom, which will have full ownership of the network, has no plans to pull the plug.

Like many dubious business decisions, this one is justified by talk of "synergy." After all, the network was started because Viacom owned a bunch of TV stations, and stations are better off when they can air prime-time network programming, even UPN's, instead of a third rerun of "Xena: Warrior Princess." Though you may lose money on the network, the argument goes, you make it back on the stations. But last year UPN lost almost two hundred million dollars, and Viacom's nineteen TV stations earned only around a hundred million dollars (just a small fraction of which was due to UPN, anyway). The math simply doesn't work.

"But we've finally turned this thing around," UPN defenders will argue. The network's ratings are up thirty-five per cent over last year, thanks mainly to the success of the weekly W.W.F. extravaganza "Smackdown!," with its trash-talking, tights-wearing, body-slamming hulks and its highly quotable dialogue ("I'm gonna check your candy ass into the smackdown hotel!"). But though "Smackdown!" is the most popular show on UPN, it's the hundred-and-seventh most popular show on network television, with a Nielsen rating of just 4.6 per cent. Three weeks ago, more people watched a rerun of "Cool Runnings," the John Candy movie about Jamaican bobsledders, than watched "Smackdown!" And UPN's over-all ratings are actually lower now than they were in 1997.



Of course, there's nothing wrong with losing lots of money today in expectation of a huge return tomorrow. That's what Viacom did with MTV and Nickelodeon, and it's the standard approach among Internet companies (though no Internet company has ever lost eight hundred million dollars in cash). Unlike cable and the Internet, though, broadcast television is a low-margin, low-growth industry. The days of huge profits and twenty-billion-dollar market caps are over.

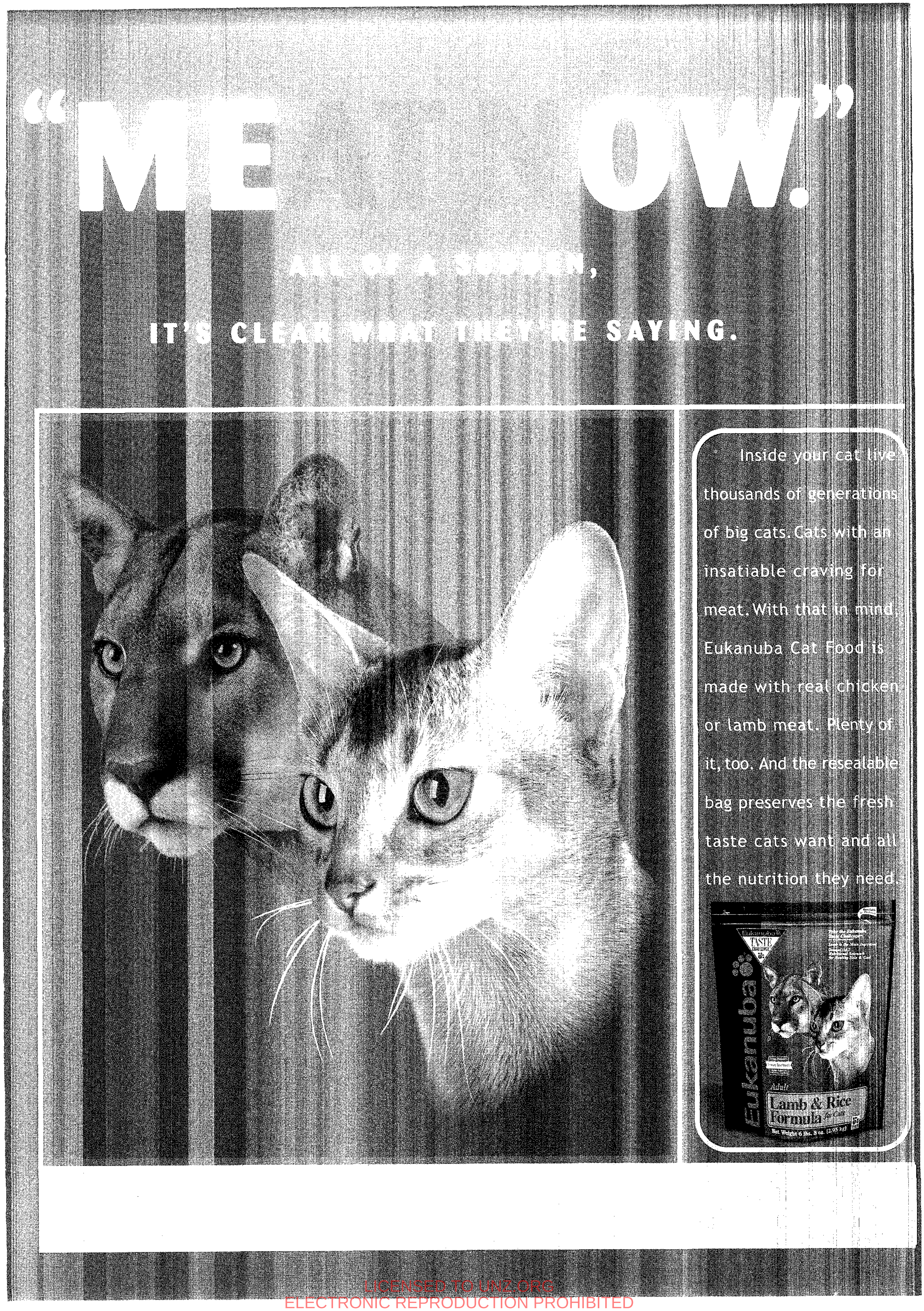
So, if you care about return on capital, UPN shouldn't exist. But it does, and it will. If you turn on your TV this Tuesday night, you—along with 1.6 per cent of the viewing audience—will still be able to catch Costas Mandylor in "Secret Agent Man." It's just not easy to abandon companies or divisions you've started, even without a good economic reason to stay with them. Take the satellite-phone service Iridium, which finally died two weeks ago after burning through five billion dollars, or *Life*, which only just folded, years after it had lost any financial or cultural reason for being. For that matter, take America's rolling-mill steel industry, which was moribund by the mid-seventies but was allowed to limp along for more than a decade, losing hundreds of millions of dollars along the way.

The allure of persistence is, in part, practical. Right now, UPN employs a lot of people, some of them very lucratively, all of them with an interest in lobbying Viacom to keep it afloat. The value that the network is destroying can seem distant; the rewards it brings to those on UPN's payroll are immediate. Then, too, behind every enterprise are people who thought it was a good idea—and want to stick it out until what they thought would happen does happen. Like General Westmoreland, executives are often convinced that they can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

To be fair, this sort of misplaced confidence—salvation through "Smackdown!"—is the same kind of irrationality that makes people entrepreneurs in the first place. As the economic historian John Sawyer showed in a classic 1952 article on economic growth in the nineteenth century, the "miscalculation or ignorance" of the odds was precisely what drove the entrepreneurial boom in everything from railroads to mining and manufacturing. So it's a good thing that most businessmen don't know how unlikely it is that they'll actually turn a profit, because if they did they wouldn't try. And if it's any consolation to Viacom shareholders UPN is the only television network with plans to air a "Baywatch"-style series about crime-fighting women volleyball players. Reason to go on.

—*James Surowiecki*

MICHAEL WITTE

"ME OW."

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PROFILES

CAESAR.COM

A Beltway billionaire and his big ideas.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

Michael Saylor's eyes are small and gray, and his hair is gray and thick. From the side, his head looks square, like a block. His nose is irregular at the tip in a way that might make another man look weak by blurring the line of his profile but makes Saylor look cruder and more aggressive. The skin of Saylor's face is pale and chalky, the skin of a person who rarely goes outdoors, which is disconcerting because he gives the impression of needing a great deal of violent exercise. He jiggles his leg when someone else is speaking. He bangs the heel of his hand on tables when he is waiting (he doesn't like to wait). He is broad-shouldered, big-boned, and moves with the heavy, opaque presence of one who is used to getting his way.

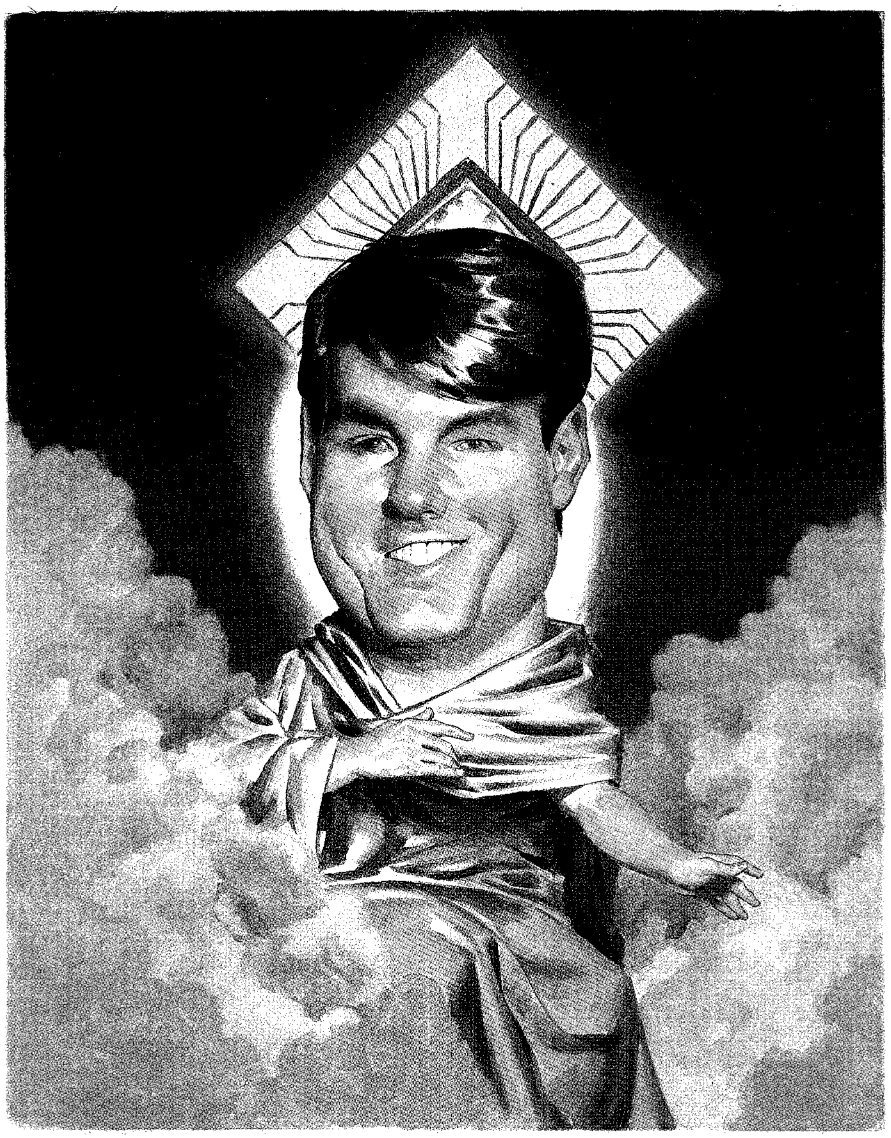
Last week, Saylor, the C.E.O. of a software company called MicroStrategy, lost six billion dollars in a single day. It rather suited him. He is not a man to do things by halves—he cultivates a style of reckless machismo. He is more afraid of boredom than of failure, he says, and in running his company he needs to be restrained by strong arms, or else, as he puts it, "I'd rip the wings off the plane and we'd crash to earth." Even now, there is part of him that relishes the spotlight and the bigness of the story. It is not every man, after all, who loses six billion dollars in a single day. "If we take an eighteen-month perspective, it's just a lot of publicity, right?" he said on the afternoon following the disaster, and laughed an abrupt, dark laugh that sounded like a bark. "It's kind of funny that all the people who never found time to write about us when we were on our way up are knocking on our door now."

The trouble started because MicroStrategy, which Saylor founded eleven years ago, when he was twenty-four, had been forced by Securities and Exchange Commission regulations to adhere to more conservative accounting practices. MicroStrategy, like many other technology firms, had tended to count immediately as revenue a large proportion of the income it expected to receive from long-term deals, while conventional firms distribute the income over the whole period covered. More dubious still, the company was accused of crediting quarters with income received after the quarters had closed. MicroStrategy revised its books, and on March 20th announced adjusted revenues that looked less impressive than previous figures; that day, its stock price fell a hundred and forty points, or just over sixty per cent.

Saylor always knew, of course, that something like this might happen. How could he not? Over the past year, MicroStrategy's shares have ranged in price from seven dollars to three hundred and thirty-three. Just two weeks ago, the company's value doubled in a matter of days. Saylor knows, as everybody knows, that what the market capriciously gives it may capriciously take away. Oddly, a month ago, with the stock price still climbing toward its zenith, he found himself thinking about Nicholas Leeson, the young trader who lost a billion dollars and brought down Barings Bank in 1995. "You can never pay back a billion dollars," Saylor mused gloomily that day. "And yet here we are with a market cap of fifteen billion: we could easily lose one billion or ten billion through no fault of our own. Part of me remembers reading about Nick Leeson and thinking, You poor, damned schmuck. But another part of me thinks, What are *you* going to say to your shareholders if you lose billions and billions of dollars of their money?"

The crash came at a particularly unfortunate moment for Saylor, since, only the week before, he had announced his intention to pledge a hundred million dollars to start an Internet university—one that would provide a free education to, as he characteristically put it, "everyone, everywhere," by means of videotaped lectures. The fusion of the two images—of his grand benevolence followed so closely by his humiliation—made Saylor's fall seem sordid, somehow, as if (though this is not the case) he had offered money that was not his to give. It is this smear on his image as a force for good that, if it lingers, will wound him most deeply. More than a rich man, Saylor wants to be a great man: a man who will change the world. He believes that his software, or future versions of it, will save lives. On the day his stock plunged, he told Reuters, "Mother Teresa never quit in a down quarter, and what we're doing is equally important." He says, "The average person in our business thinks he has a good company and would like to sell some software. I think my software is going to become so ubiquitous, so essential, that if it stops working there will be riots. I think I'm on a mission from God, and if you don't buy from me we're all going to Hell. I mean that literally. I mean that people will die this year because they didn't buy my software. Imagine you have a cure for cancer, you walk into a cancer ward, and a guy kicks you out. How would you feel? I feel like that. I feel that if I don't succeed it's an abomination in the eyes of God."

Saylor clings to the hope that his chance to change the world has not been taken away from him. Most likely, it has not. After all, he has nearly two thousand people working for him. Even if his stock price remains at its current level, his company is still worth several billion dollars, which is considerably more than it was worth last year. Because he is rich and because he has a way with words, people listen to him, and while some find his ideas grandiose many others are eager to follow him in whatever he does. He is just thirty-five, but he is in a position to give flesh to any number of the indefinite visions that agitate his brain. There are so many things he wants to do!



"If you don't buy from me, we're all going to Hell," Michael Saylor says. "I mean that literally. People will die this year because they didn't buy my software."

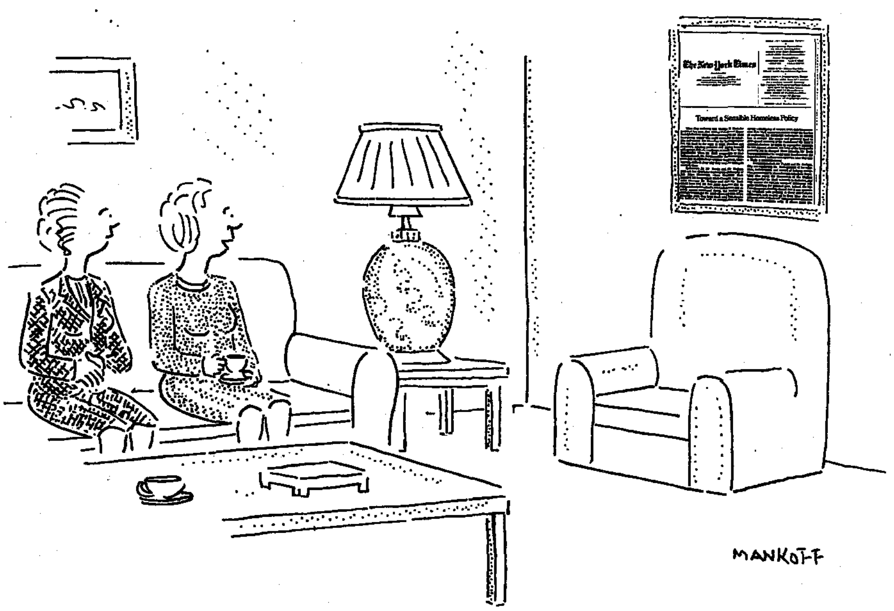
DANIEL ADEL

For the moment, though, there is a noticeable discrepancy between Saylor's splendid ambitions and the enterprise in which he is engaged from day to day. For most of its history, MicroStrategy's main business has been the production of data-mining software, which allows a company to sort through the vast amount of information it amasses about its transactions and draw useful conclusions. Victoria's Secret, for instance, used to stock all its stores with the same inventory. No longer. According to MicroStrategy's analysis, women in Chicago require bigger bra sizes than women elsewhere, and women in Miami prefer cream-colored lingerie to black. Victoria's Secret learned to vary its inventory store by store and increased its profits. Blockbuster used MicroStrategy software to track the movie tastes of its customers in order to send out individually tailored promotions. But a few years ago Saylor grew dissatisfied with the data-mining business. There were only so many companies big enough to take advantage of his services. Suppose he sold his software to every single one of them—what then? Even before he came up with his plan to save the world, he knew that, more than profits, he wanted his company to achieve size and gravity. He wanted to create a great institution that would last a thousand years. He wanted to be Caesar, and build a second Roman Empire. In order to do so, he knew he needed to come up with a product that would appeal to a constituency wider than a few hundred executives. He needed a product like electricity, which would come to seem essential.

When he explains this turning point in his career, Saylor likes to tell a story about Konosuke Matsuhita, the man largely responsible for what came to be thought of as the Japanese way of doing business: taking expensive American products and making them so cheap that almost anyone could afford them. Saylor says, "Matsuhita used to tell his employees, as a parable, 'I had a dream last night. I dreamed that I was a beggar with nothing to my name but a bucket. I was walking through a town square, and I saw a fountain full of clean, fresh water. I walked over to that fountain, I filled up my bucket, and I walked off happy.' What that meant to Matsuhita was that he must strive to make every product he produced as cheap and available as water. Transistor radios like water. Microwave ovens like water. TV sets like water." Saylor adopted the motto "Intelligence like water."

Saylor decided that, in addition to producing decision-support software—intelligence—for companies, he needed to start producing it for individuals: software that would deliver to a person just the right information, just in time to prevent him from making foolish or dangerous mistakes. It was this move into consumer software (and Saylor's extravagant predictions for its future, which lent glamour to its rather prosaic beginnings) that transformed MicroStrategy's stock, in the course of the last year, from a good solid bet into a wildly successful but also wildly volatile corner of the market. In the long term, Saylor envisions a world in which everyone will have a tiny device implanted in his ear that will whisper advice to him as he needs it. If a crime is taking place near him (the device will know where he is), the voice in his ear will warn him. If he is on the way to the hospital, the voice will inform him of the success rate of each of its doctors. Saylor imagines that his customer of the future will travel through a world in which guesswork—and the inefficiencies and risk that accompany it—has been eliminated. He will save himself time and money, and thus, as Saylor likes to think of it, life.

In the near term, Saylor has begun marketing an information service that sends its owner, via the text screen of his cell phone or PalmPilot, news of a more banal variety. If his stocks are plunging, it will alert him to this fact and (at some point soon) allow him to sell or buy with the push of a button. (Saylor calls this function the "dead-C.E.O. alert.") If he has given it permission (and the key to this system, in Saylor's mind, is obtaining permission to intrude on people), it will take on the functions of a personal secretary. It might wake him in the night to reschedule a cancelled flight or automatically shuffle his debt between different credit cards. Saylor likes to contrast his service with the Internet by imagining a Web site called IsYourHouseOnFire?.com: if you logged on, this site would tell you whether or not your house was on fire, but it would hardly compare in usefulness to a service that you could rely on to page you with that information and automatically phone the fire department. Saylor sees his service as insurance against unpleasant surprises. "What are you afraid of?" he asks. "I'm afraid of missing my plane. I'm afraid I'll be outside when there's a crime in my neighborhood. Even if you're not afraid of these things, the beauty is, with proper marketing, we can make you afraid."


The New York Times
Toward a Sensible Homeless Policy
MANKOFF

"It's the editorial he was fulminating against when he keeled over and croaked."

Saylor markets his service through a new subsidiary of MicroStrategy: Strategy.com. One recent afternoon, he met with Strategy.com's director of business development, Nick Orolin, to discuss negotiations in progress. The two sat down together in a small conference room next to Saylor's office, which is on the fourteenth floor of a Philip Johnson office building in Vienna, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. Orolin handed Saylor the draft of a proposed deal. At the moment, Strategy.com doesn't market its software directly; it syndicates it through other companies. The *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, offers the service to its customers as a way for them to check their portfolios. Orolin's draft concerned another, similar partnership. Saylor began to read. He slumped back in his chair. The muscles in his face were slack, and his eyes were half closed, as though he were in a resting mode, reserving strength for an attack. Orolin took a sip from a can of Coke and watched Saylor's face as he read. Orolin did not seem like a man designed for meetings such as this one. He wore an open-necked white shirt and faded jeans, and was cultivating a small goatee. He looked as though he might act Shakespeare in regional theatre, or manage a restaurant somewhere sunny.

"Who wrote this?" Saylor asked, after a minute, still reading.

"Max did," Orolin told him. (Max is not the man's real name.) "I reviewed it."

"So you're suggesting you want to send this out to them."

"I'm suggesting I want you to review it first," Orolin said.

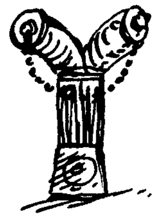
"You don't want me to yell at you?"

"I'd rather you yelled at me now than after I showed it to them."

Saylor continued to read, turning pages quickly, and mumbling under his breath. "What are we doing here?" he asked finally, making a gesture of baffled irritation with one hand and holding up the proposal with another. "This is not what I discussed with Max. Why isn't he in front of me right now? I don't know where he got this stuff."

"That's why I wanted to show it to you," Orolin said.

"It's incoherent. I don't understand what he's talking about. You need to find somebody else to write this, because Max is just not up to the task. O.K., here's what we should offer." Saylor sighed, and, still slouching back in his chair, rapidly dictated another complete proposal. "O.K.?" he said, when he was finished. "Next!"



Orolin exhaled nervously and launched into a description of his dealings with the representative of another company—another potential customer—which had been extensive and, so far, fruitless.

"Who is this guy?" Saylor interjected. "Why are we meeting with him?"

Orolin began to explain.

"Why are we selling *them*?" Saylor asked, interrupting. "They should tell *us* they're interested. As far as I'm concerned, they're an unqualified customer. O.K.? Next. Next. Next!" He thumped his hand impatiently on the table.

At twenty past two, Saylor left the conference room and sat down at his computer. That day, he had seven thousand six hundred and ninety-two E-mails in his in-box, of which two thousand two hundred and eighty were unread. His desk was covered with a messy heap of paper, and across the room sat a carton full of letters and packages that he had received several months before but had not yet got around to opening. Saylor is a big-picture man, not a detail man.

Saylor's assistant, Paul Zolfaghari, appeared at his side and reminded him that a job candidate had been waiting for him in another conference room since two o'clock. Zolfaghari was sharply turned out in a black suit and black glasses, his black hair wetly slicked. His urbane look was undermined, though, by the tense air he wore of one who expects that at any moment a disaster will occur over which he has no control but for which he will, nonetheless, be blamed. Saylor marched out of his office and down the hall. In the conference room, the job candidate, a young blond woman, stood in front of a screen with a laptop and slides. Saylor walked over to the head of the table and sat down. He looked about him.

"Why are there so many people here?" he asked loudly. "Don't we have better stuff to do?" There were seven other people at the table, including most of the top executives in the company. One of them explained under his breath that since the woman was a candidate for a fairly senior position the attendance was appropriate. Saylor shrugged and leaned back in his chair. He jiggled his leg under the table. He cracked his knuckles. If there is anything that he can't stand, it's waste. Wasted time, wasted money, wasted people—they all make him crazy. If he is short with his employees on this topic now, though, it's nothing compared with how he used to react. He used to yell a lot and make people cry. Then he realized that the small inefficiencies he was yelling about were costing him much less money than replacing the employees who quit as a result. He learned, as he puts it, that "a company is a machine with parts in flesh, not titanium, so you can't just crank it, because you'll strip the gears."

Saylor's mania for efficiency is not limited to employee performance: it is part of his larger vision for the company. Take traffic, for instance. Traffic in suburban Virginia is a notorious problem, and Saylor can't stand the thought of the whole highway system wasting everybody's time, in a predictable manner, every day. The state's answer is to build bigger highways. Saylor's answer is to install, as he imagines it, the MicroStrategy equivalent of air-traffic controllers. He wants the state to give a wireless device to every one of its driving residents, and obtain from them in return information about their driving routine. This way, he thinks, the state could send out daily messages to individuals, letting them know when the highways were jammed, and encouraging them, depending on traffic that afternoon, that minute, to vary their route. "It's not just traffic," Saylor will continue, once he has warmed to this topic. "All the arteries in our civilization are clogged. We just don't know they're clogged, because they've been so bad for so long that we've stopped thinking about it. When I say 'Intelligence every-

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where,' what I mean is, I want to purge every single piece of waste and inefficiency from every single industry on this planet."

In the late afternoon, Saylor was due to deliver a welcome address to a new class of MicroStrategy recruits assembled in a rented hall at a local Marriott Hotel. For them, it was the first day of MicroStrategy's introductory "boot camp." Boot camp consists of a series of training sessions—including a day outdoors engaging in ropes courses, bonding rituals, and trust-building exercises—which lasts between two and six weeks. Saylor is a great believer in the importance of company culture. In years past, he was famous within MicroStrategy for extending his boot-camp addresses into heroic, Castro-esque monologues: once, he spoke for eight hours without stopping.

Saylor arrived a few minutes late, and strode to the front of the room. He smiled at the new recruits, and the new recruits smiled back. "Who are we competing with in order to capture your hearts and minds?" he asked. He looked around the room. "Other software companies? Other employers?" he said, echoing suggestions from the floor. "What else?" He paused. No one could think of any other answer. Finally, he told them, "*Anything else you could do with your time.* You could stay at home, raise the kids, go to college, write the Great American Novel, or slit your wrists and end it all. Those are all alternatives to working for us. Perhaps you considered some of them." The recruits laughed at this, and Saylor waited for silence, to indicate that his next point was no joking matter. "My job," he said, "is to make sure that I'm providing you with a combination of economic, psychic, and emotional benefits that make working for MicroStrategy better than anything else you can do."

Saylor takes his employees' happiness extremely seriously. To him, MicroStrategy is less a company than a nation of which he is President, and if someone quits he feels it personally, like a lost vote. He keeps track of how many people have left since the company started, and he wonders why they left. Each year, he pays for a Caribbean cruise for his entire staff, to build company solidarity. In his concern with retaining his employees, Saylor couldn't be more different from the typical Silicon Valley entrepreneur, who expects, even welcomes, constant turnover, because he associates genius with an addiction to instability and risk. Saylor considers the Silicon Valley business model immature. Novelty per se holds no allure for him. He doesn't want to be Jim Clark. He wants to be Caesar. When he took MicroStrategy public, in 1998, he created two types of stock. Class A stockholders—the public—received one vote per share. Class B stockholders—Saylor and a few of his most senior employees—received ten. Saylor himself retained more than fifty per cent of the company's stock, insuring that he could never be outvoted, and thus never merged, dissolved, or otherwise done away with by some profit-seeking M.B.A. at a mutual fund. This capital structure not only gives Saylor control over financial decisions; it also gives him the wherewithal to promise his employees that if they are there for him he will be there for them. "My commitment is that as long as you're competent I will never let you off while I have a dime," he says. "I'm not going to sell you down the river."

What Saylor requires in return is good citizenship. "Know your place, play your position, make sacrifices for the group," he told the new recruits, many of whom, he knew, being immigrants from mainstream technology culture, would find this injunction bizarre. "The unforgivable sin in our organization is to cause your teammates to lose trust in you. It's O.K. to fail, it's O.K. to be stupid, but it's not O.K. to lie. If you can't trust one person, the entire civilization breaks down. Any one of you could be the source of our success, and any one of you could be the source of our destruction."

Saylor lives in a small, nondescript town house next to several dozen exactly like it. The house's chief merit is that it is situated ten minutes from the MicroStrategy offices, but that is all he really requires of it. Owning a house at all is progress for him. For three months after he moved MicroStrategy to Virginia from Delaware, in 1994, Saylor slept on a sofa at the house of his C.O.O. and college roommate, Sanju Bansal. Then he decided that he needed a place of his own, so he bought a house identical to Bansal's, a few yards away, but for three years the house had no furniture. When he did get around to furnishing it, he bought forty-two matching pieces, all at once. It's not that he lacks opinions on matters of décor. He has a favorite color: black. But he is not what one might call a nester.

The house now has things in it, but it retains a halting, detached air, as though it had been assembled with the help of a manual. Most of the objects in Saylor's living room are gifts, which he has placed on display in a large, glass-fronted cabinet, like fossil specimens of uncertain significance. The cabinet contains, for instance, a small congregation of painted figurines—gnomes, wizards, elves, and dragons—given to Saylor by his mother. From his living room, one gets the sense that he understands that houses are supposed to have small decorative objects in them as well as furniture, and that if one is presented with such an object it is appropriate to display it, but that he has not yet learned to form relationships with these possessions. One of the few items in the room that he appears emotionally attached to is a framed reproduction of van Gogh's "Haystacks in Provence," which he describes as "soothing." Placed here and there about the room is a collection of houseplants in brass pots, selected by Saylor's butler and cook, Brian. Brian is English and cooks English food, which is the kind of food that Saylor likes: roast beef, well done; baked potatoes with butter; cauliflower cheese.

On top of a sideboard next to the kitchen, where Brian works in a chef's uniform, Saylor has assembled a small group of family photographs. Saylor's parents now live in Tampa, but, since his father was a noncommissioned officer in the Air Force, Saylor grew up on bases all over the world. Military culture is important to him; his preoccupation with safety and control, he says, is in part a response to the contrast between the security of military bases and the distressing uncertainty of the rest of the world. There is still a military quality to his corporate bravado—in his claim, for instance, that when it comes to risk the only thing to fear is fear itself. "Most kids go through life afraid of being hit," he says. "The best thing you can do for your kid? Punch him! Punch him so he realizes it stinks, it hurts, but it doesn't kill you." In seventh grade, Saylor won a prize for best newspaper boy, and in high school he was a member of the marching band. He attended M.I.T. on a R.O.T.C. scholarship; at the time he left for college, he says, his parents had ten thousand dollars in the bank.

In the last two years, since he became a billionaire, Saylor has been making an effort to polish himself: to learn about culture and how to talk to people at parties. He is not naturally at ease in social situations, and though he is more gregarious than he used to be, there is still a trace of robot in his manner, as if he were teaching himself, carefully and systematically, the conventions of nonverbal communication. But this has not proved an impediment to his ascent through Washington and international society: he has become known for throwing extravagant parties, and is rumored to have dated Queen Noor.

As he has become more interested in, if not people themselves, exactly, then the mechanics of social life, Saylor has begun to think about going into politics. He has always been interested in politics as a system of thought. For his undergraduate thesis, inspired by Machiavelli's "Discourses," he designed a computer program that simulated the responses of different systems of government to a variety of misfortunes such as famine and war. When it comes time for him to step down from the helm of MicroStrategy, he plans to write a constitution for the company, modelled on the United States Constitution, complete with a bill of rights and separation of powers. In recent years, his rapidly increasing wealth has made him a cynosure in political circles. He has been invited to the White House several times, and he meets with senators and congressmen. It was, perhaps, inevitable that, under the circumstances, a man like him would begin to toy with the alluring prospect of running a real country, in which millions, not hundreds, of people would listen to his speeches and feel his influence over their lives. It is not in Saylor's nature to be coy about his ambitions, but, realizing that some modesty is appropriate, he has taken to dropping allusions to a political career in the form of jokes. The invitation to his thirty-fifth birthday party, for instance, read, "Guess who's old enough to run for president?"

Saylor's most ambitious self-improvement project to date consists of an estate he is planning to build over the next few years, on fifty acres of land he recently bought, a few miles away, in Great Falls. He wants to build something extraordinary: not chiefly a home for himself—more a flagship palace for his company, to which he can invite executives and politicians and other important people and entertain them in a manner that reflects the glory of his mission. He will model the main house on a French neoclassical mansion in Newport, Rhode Island, that he saw in the movie version of "The Great Gatsby." Elsewhere on the estate, he will build an observatory, stables, and a golf course. On the roof of the main house, he plans to erect a greenhouse more than a hundred feet long, with orange trees and lemon trees and a swimming pool in the center. He will build, too, some sort of movable floor, so that on festive nights he can cover the pool and transform the greenhouse into a ballroom under the stars.

In the early evening, Saylor was scheduled to fly to a golf resort in Arizona for a MicroStrategy executive summit. He was going to take the jet. Saylor pays for his jet out of his own pocket, and, while sometimes he claims it saves him so much time that it's cost-effective, at other times he admits that his primary motive in buying it was that he considered it incredibly cool. Saylor climbed on board, along with Sanju Bansal and Joe Payne. Payne, Saylor's chief marketing officer, joined the company a year ago, and though he dresses casually, in flannel shirts, he has the alert, watchful air of one still proving himself. Bansal, on the other hand, has nothing to prove. He was Saylor's closest friend at M.I.T. and the first person Saylor called when he formed his company, in 1989. At MicroStrategy, Bansal is the detail man, the people man, and the man generally relied upon to prevent Saylor from spinning out of control (or "vaporizing," as Saylor, a former "Star Trek" fan, puts it). Bansal seems well suited to these tasks:

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his face habitually arranges itself in a cheerful, beneficent smile, and his presence is as calming in its air of gentle competence as Saylor's is jolting.

Once inside the jet, Saylor shrugged off his suit jacket and sat down heavily. The plane was furnished with eight expansive beige leather seats, a sofa in the back, and a well-stocked bar. Saylor ordered a diet Coke. The flight attendant brought over an assortment of snacks, and Saylor selected Nutter Butters and a packet of Goldfish. Saylor and Payne were in the middle of an argument about an upcoming advertising campaign. Saylor wanted the advertisements to carry the name "MicroStrategy.com," so that customers would know immediately where to find the company on the Web. Payne disagreed.

"I think it cheapens our brand," he said.

"Why?"

"Because MicroStrategy is an industry-strength brand, and dot-com makes us look like a Johnny-come-lately."

Payne disliked the idea for other reasons as well. For one thing, with Saylor's wireless initiative, the company's identity would soon become associated with the idea that Web sites were a second-rate way to obtain information. Besides, wasn't it inevitable that in two or three years the dot-com suffix would begin to sound embarrassingly dated? But Saylor wasn't listening.

"Anyone who doesn't put their URL in their ads in this day and age is incompetent," he declared, munching on a Nutter Butter. "The one thing in marketing is not to confuse the consumer."

After a while, the argument petered out, unresolved. Payne and Bansal produced identical Dell laptops and began to work. Saylor sat back in his seat and looked out the window. When he is surrounded by people he likes and trusts, Saylor seems younger and more lighthearted. He talks in his usual bulldozerish manner, but in a way that's reminiscent less of corporate bullying than of beery late-night arguments in college. This is not surprising, since several of Saylor's top executives are friends from that period in his life: from R.O.T.C., or from his fraternity at M.I.T. Saylor feels his fraternity bonds strongly, but his relationship to the university as a whole is more ambivalent. It was not a place that encouraged bonds. "At M.I.T., they taught us that it's better to fail alone than succeed together," he says. Back then, Saylor subscribed to this loner ethos. He played guitar in a band called Not Tonight. He imagined that he could change the world from his desk, by himself, through hard work and hard thinking. By now, he has realized that if he wants to get things done he must learn to adjust himself to the queer, illogical mental byways and emotional needs of other people, but it wasn't until quite recently that he realized how far he had moved away from his college ideal. That realization came to him all at once, one fateful weekend, which he now recalls in the form of a parable.

"Ten years after I left M.I.T., I went back for my college reunion," he began, looking around the plane to make sure everyone was listening. "My friend Charles Veley, who was one of the first people I asked to join my company, and who graduated from Harvard the same year, went back for his reunion the same weekend. It was 1997, the year before we went public, and I wanted to hire a bunch of vice-president-level people. There were a thousand people in my class when I graduated. How many do you think were at the reunion?"

Saylor paused dramatically. "Fifty," he announced. "And how many of my friends were there? One. I was ready to have fun and backslap and hire people. Instead, it was the worst weekend I'd had in ten years. I wanted to chew my arm off. I felt completely and utterly alone. And here's what made it doubly depressing: up at Harvard, out of fifteen hundred people in Veley's class seven hundred came back, and they went out dancing and drinking and carousing, they were meeting each other and marrying each other and hiring each other. And all I could think was, Mike, you were wrong, they were right. Everything I've ever believed in my life—that it's a great thing that M.I.T. lets in only the intellectual crème de la crème, not the prom queen and the racquetball guy and the student-body president, like Harvard does—was all wrong. We should have let those guys in, because those guys are the social lubricant that lets us not all hate each other. M.I.T. let in nine hundred individual nerds in cubes.

"Veley hired a guy from his class, and we just made him head of Strategy.com. That guy is going to take Strategy.com public as its president and C.O.O. because of who he knows. And on that same weekend that we hired our future president, I guarantee you, somewhere off in Silicon Valley six hundred M.I.T. nerds from my class were lying under tables in their cubicles with their beanies on, cussing out the establishment and laughing about that stupid reunion."

Although Saylor now knows that social ability is important to success in business, he still has difficulty with the concept of leisure. He considered the issue as he sat in his hotel room in Arizona, the day after his arrival on the jet. He had a few minutes to spare between meetings. "If I go to a movie theatre on a Saturday night by myself," he said, "while I'm sitting there I'll be thinking, You have a fifteen-billion-dollar responsibility, you have time to watch a movie? What if that three hours is the margin of success? If I were to calculate the true value of my time to the company, there's no way I could justify doing anything other than working. I've become fatalistic about failure, because otherwise I'd go insane."

It was sunny and warm outside, and most of the executives Saylor had invited to the conference were playing golf. Saylor doesn't play golf, however. He sat on the sofa in his dark suit. It was a month before the crash. "My friends say, 'Oh, he doesn't know how to have fun anymore,' " he continued. "But I feel like I'm in the control room of a nuclear reactor that could melt down at any moment. I feel like part of me is staring down into the depths of Hell, part of me is looking up to Heaven, and behind me there's a casual happy hour going on where the people are thinking, Why doesn't that guy lighten up?" Saylor paused, and stared out the window. He admired the small artificial waterfall that the hotel had built specially to provide his room with a view. He wondered whether he should build one like it on the grounds of his new house. He said, "I just hope I don't get up one day and have to look at myself in the mirror and say, 'You had fifteen billion and you blew it all. There's the guy who flushed fifteen billion dollars down the toilet.' " ♦

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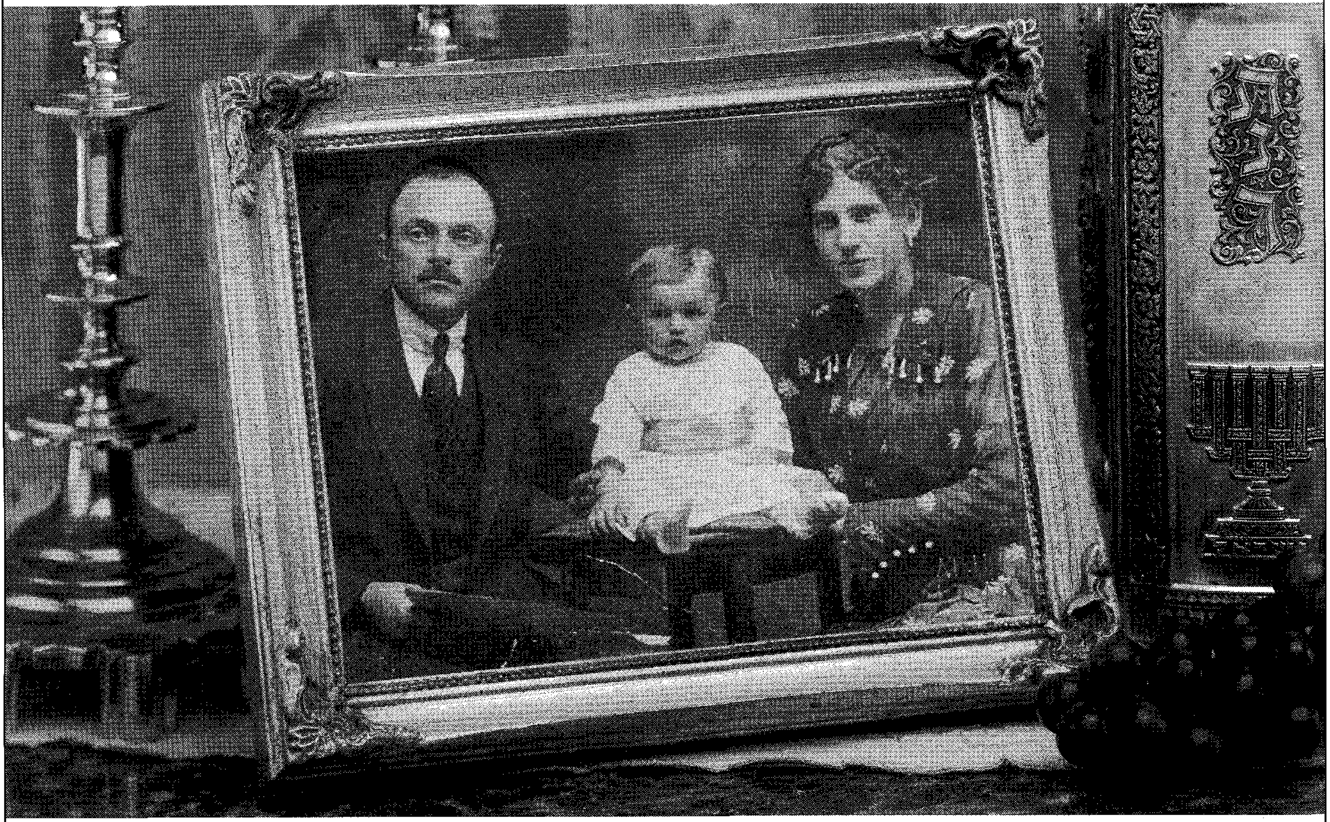

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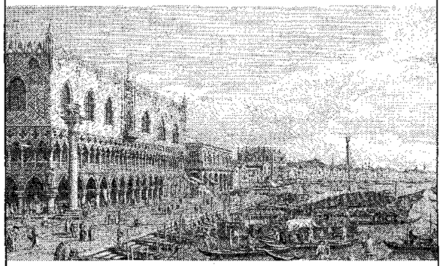

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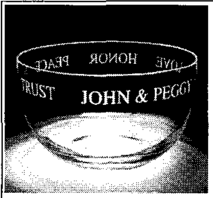

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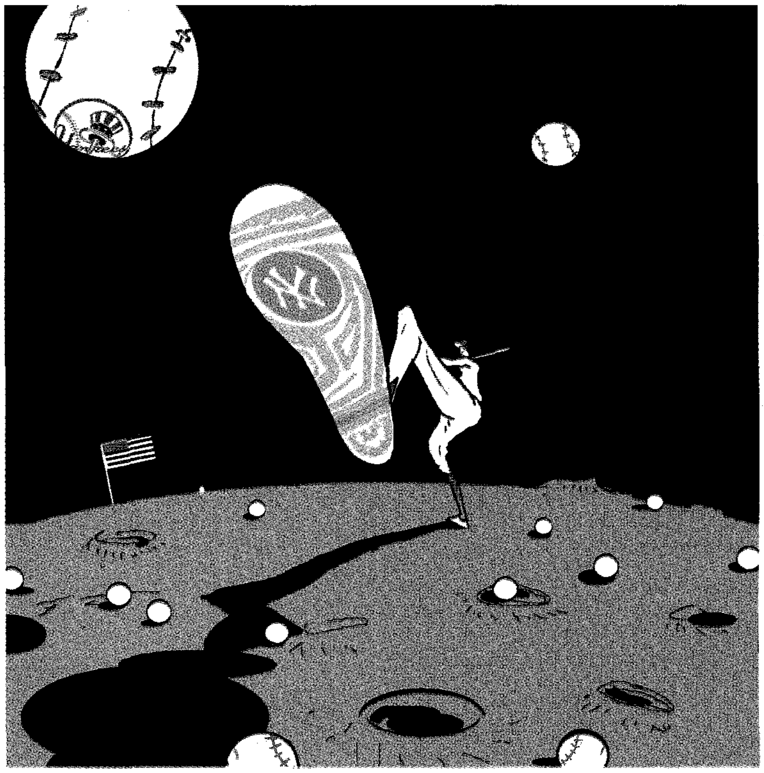


ISTVAN BANYAI

Each year, it doesn't get a little harder—it gets doubly harder.—*Yankees owner George Steinbrenner, on the pressures of staying on top.*

April 22nd. Undefeated New York beats Toronto 12–0 to open a seven-game lead over Boston in the American League East. Bernie Williams slugs his seventh consecutive home run, tying Tino Martinez's week-old record.

May 13th. A hundred-and-two-hit attack paces undefeated New York to a 48–1 drubbing of Detroit in a game where each Yankee plays on one foot while juggling flaming torches. Yanks agree to play tomorrow's game with live tigers released onto the field. Following the game, Yankee manager Joe Torre says he is considering accepting the Presidential nomination of the Reform Party.

June 12th. The undefeated Yankees rally to dominate Boston 14–1 in a game eclipsed by fifth-inning ceremonies at home plate. There, Israeli and Palestinian leaders end decades of violence by signing a peace accord negotiated by catcher Jorge Posada. As a gesture to the new alliance, co-signers Ehud Barak and Yasir Arafat share duties in left field for New York, going a combined three-for-five with two runs batted in.

July 11th. The undefeated Yankees crush a combined American/National League All-Star team 16–0, but the post-game mood is sombre, because David Cone's string of perfect innings has ended at a hundred and twelve. The lone hit, a blooper that lands behind second base, occurs because right fielder Paul O'Neill is in the bleachers, delivering quintuplets.

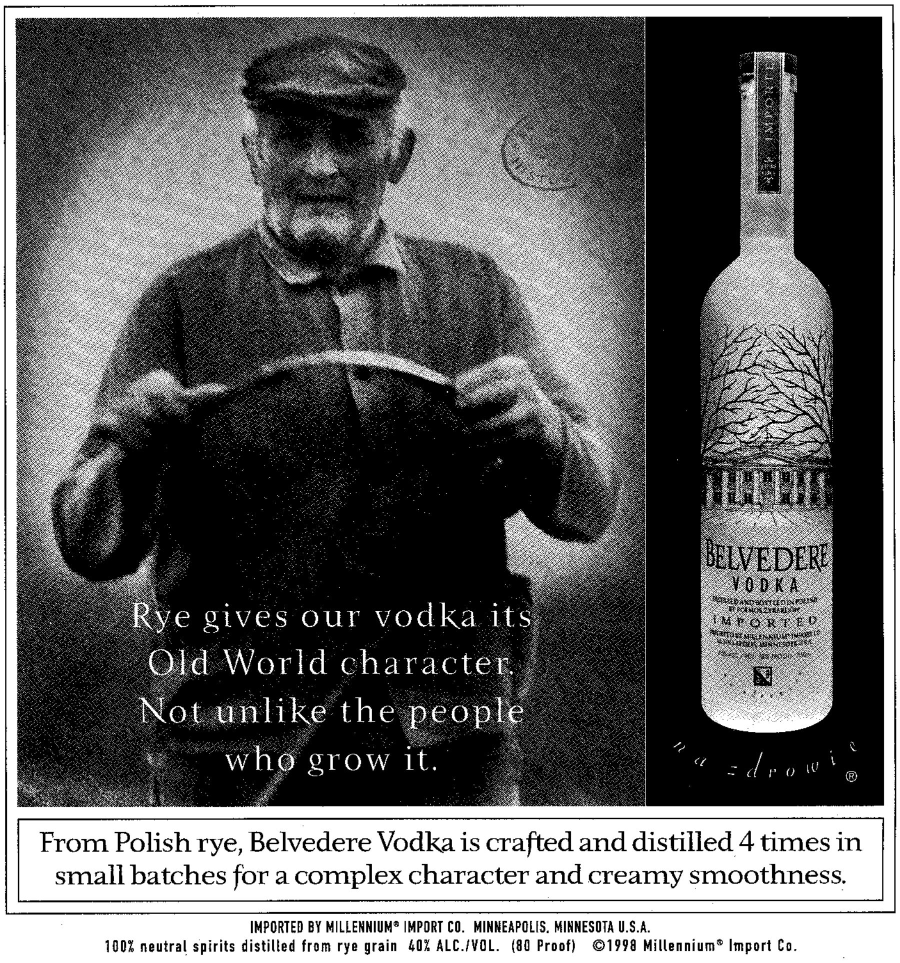
August 1st. With ushers and beer venders pitching, the undefeated Yankees clinch the pennant in a 23–0 win over Kansas City. The use of stadium employees frees up bullpen ace Mariano Rivera to finish his cold-fusion project, providing the world with unlimited power. Grateful Bostonians, repenting their past, gather downtown to dedicate a two-hundred-foot statue of Bucky Dent.

September 3rd. Following their nine-hour, 86–1 drubbing of Minnesota, a game called after six innings, Yankee players and coaches bid farewell to Scott Brosius, Chuck Knoblauch, and Derek Jeter. At the request of NASA, the trio leave for Florida, where they will fly into outer space and blow up an asteroid that threatens humanity. During the game, outfielder Bernie Williams strokes his six-hundred-and-seventy-first and six-hundred-and-seventy-second home runs of the year, maintaining his pace to break Hank Aaron's career record of seven hundred and fifty-five.

October 1st. In an event that baffles geologists, the East River parts for six minutes to allow the Yankee bus to reach Yankee Stadium in time for the team's hundred-and-sixty-second game, a 9–1 squeaker over Baltimore. Following the lead of the new Microscoft Corp. chairman, Darryl Strawberry, the Yankees donate all their money to charity.

November 14th. The World Champion Yankees, defending Earth in a series to determine the future of the human species, best a plucky squad of eight-limbed Martians 13–2, behind the three-hit pitching of United Nations Secretary-General Orlando Hernández. After the game, the Intergalactic Space Command levitates Yankee Stadium to a designated site in midtown Manhattan.

December 24th. Behind their team of trusty reindeer, the Yankees fly at dusk, bringing toys to children around the world. Tomorrow, as President-elect Joe Torre celebrates with his team at the White House, Bostonians will gather downtown to hear George Steinbrenner's Christmas message. "Each year, it doesn't get doubly harder," he will tell the jubilant throng. "It gets triply harder." ♦



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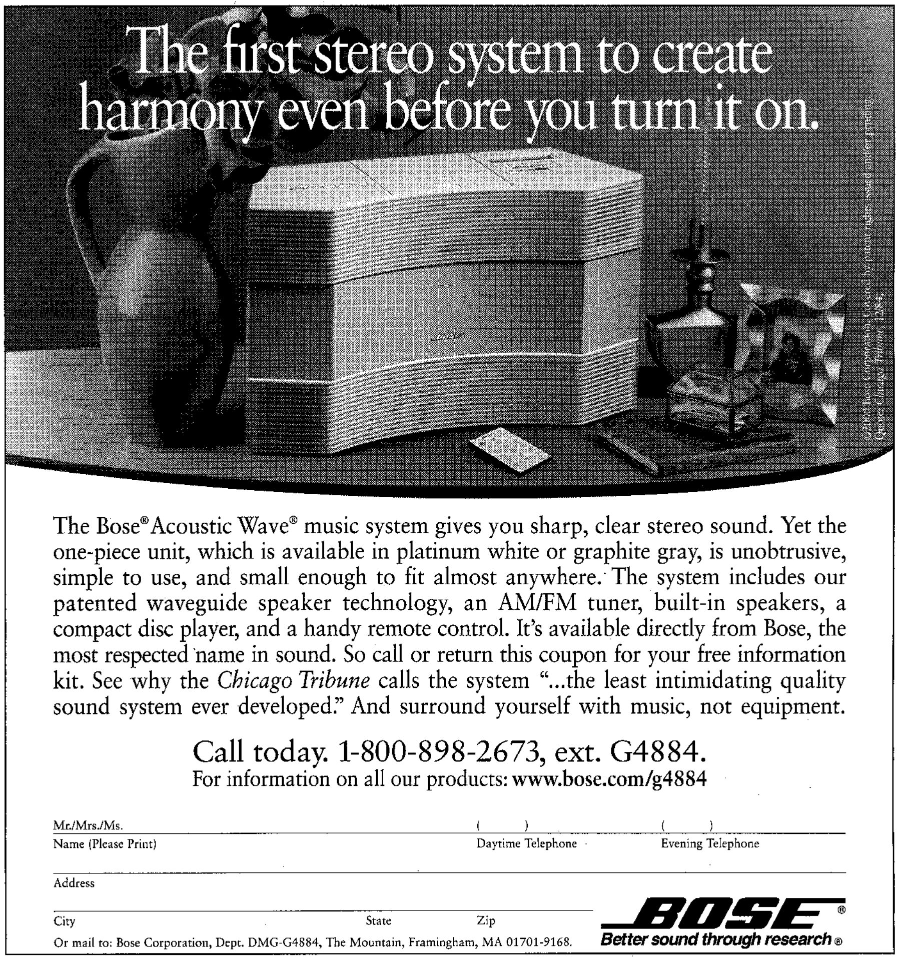

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SELLING THE WEATHER

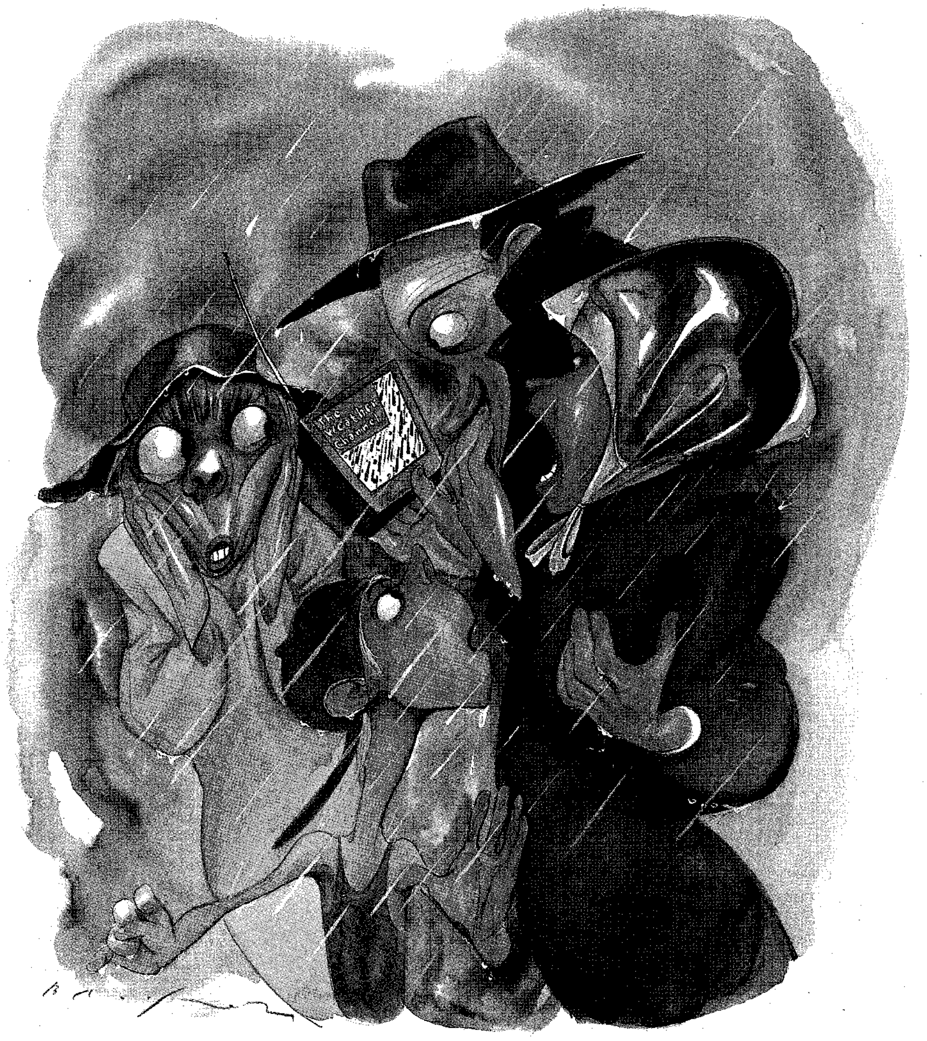
The climate is becoming more extreme, and so is the way we watch it.

BY JOHN SEABROOK

Getting up early on the morning of January 24th, I thought the city seemed oddly quiet, but it wasn't until I looked out the window that I saw the snow. The "Surprise Storm" that hit the East Coast of the United States that morning was under way, dumping as much as twenty inches of snow in Raleigh, eight and a half in Philadelphia, and six in New York. For the previous three weeks, unseasonably balmy weather had been the topic of small talk everywhere: why was it so warm, wasn't it weird that there was no snow—was it another sign of global warming? Now the first big winter storm of the season comes along, and the National Weather Service, the federal government's weather agency, doesn't put out an advisory until ten o'clock the night before. (The N.W.S. had been on the network news just a week earlier, announcing new weather supercomputers, which are supposed to make forecasts even more accurate.) Forecasters had seen a low-pressure system moving toward the southeast on the National Weather Service's satellite pictures, but all the major computer models said the storm would head out to sea. As Elliot Abrams, the chief forecaster and senior vice-president of the State College, Pennsylvania, forecasting company AccuWeather, told me later, "Who am I to say the numerical guidance is wrong?"

I turned on the Weather Channel, as I always do for big storms. The forecast may have been inadequate, but the live coverage was superb. In New York City, the Weather Channel was out in force, filming cars driving through slushy puddles and reporters sticking rulers into the snow in Central Park. I settled in for a little "weatherporn"—the voyeuristic weather-watching experience that has become a condition of modern life.

Ever since widespread weather-data collection began, shortly after the invention of the telegraph, in the eighteen-forties, accurate forecasting has been the goal of the weather report. But in recent years TV weather has given increasing time and emphasis to live pictures of weather, usually in the viewing area, but sometimes elsewhere if the weather is atrocious and the pictures dramatic—and this is transforming the weather report. In some respects, these broadcasts seem more like news than like "weather" in the traditional sense. Weather "events" are hyped, covered, and analyzed, just like politics and sports. (The Weather Channel acknowledged this in a recent TV ad created by Chiat/Day which depicted weather enthusiasts in the guise of sports fanatics, their faces painted like weather maps, rooting for lows and highs in a fictional "weather bar" known as the Front.) At the same time, the news, which once stuck to human affairs, now includes an ever larger number of weather-related stories. From 1989 to 1995, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, weather coverage wasn't among the top-ten topics on the nightly network news. In 1996, it was eighth, and in 1998 it was fourth—more than eleven hundred weather-related stories ran altogether. (According to the American Red Cross, 1998 was the most expensive year ever for natural-disaster relief.) Wild weather is also a standard component of reality-based programming on Fox and the Discovery Channel. And in book publishing re-



We seem to be moving back toward a school of thinking in which weird weather is taken as a sign of cosmic displeasure for our failure as stewards of the earth.

cent best-sellers like "The Perfect Storm," "Into Thin Air," and "Isaac's Storm" have helped create a hot market for weather-related disaster stories. This is not so much a new market, though, as a revival of one of the oldest genres in publishing: Increase Mather's 1684 book "Remarkable Providences," which includes several chapters on extreme weather around New England, was one of the early weather thrillers in the New World.

This newsier approach to weather, with its focus on weather events to help boost ratings, means certain kinds of weather get overblown while less telegenic but no less significant weather is overlooked. Take heat, for example. Eight of the ten warmest years on record occurred in the nineteen-nineties, the two others in the eighties. (If the planet continues to warm at the present rate, some climatologists predict an increase in global surface temperatures of between two and a half and six degrees by the year 2100.) But heat doesn't do particularly well on television. You can track a blizzard on Doppler radar as it moves up a map of the East Coast, but you can't watch heat. And drought, as Robert Henson, a writer at the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research and the author of a book about TV weathercasting, told me recently, "is the ultimate non-event. You usually hear about the drought only when some rain event comes along to end it."

This is an old complaint—that ratings-driven, storm-of-the-century-style coverage makes it harder to get accurate information about the weather—and it has been heard here in New York at least as far back as the overhyped Hurricane Gloria, in 1985. But it's not only the broadcasters' doing: the public's fascination with wild weather is apparently inexhaustible. We live in peaceful, prosperous times, when the only massive external threat to home and hearth is weather. When a big storm comes along, you can almost feel the nation girding its loins as people gratefully turn their attention away from "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire."

Could our preoccupation with storms reflect a more profound shift in the way we think about the weather? Ever since that famous day, in June, 1752, when Benjamin Franklin and his son flew a kite in a thunderstorm and proved that lightning was electricity, storm science has been the subject of reasoned deduction, free of the superstition that Puritan theologians brought to their doom-haunted accounts of terrible weather. Today's fears about global warming may represent the end of this age of enlightenment. With growing public awareness of changes in the climate, and a readiness to link those changes to any and all weather anomalies, we appear to be moving away from Franklin's school of meteorology and back toward an Increase Mather school, in which extreme weather is taken as a sign of cosmic displeasure for our failure as stewards of the earth.

STEVE BRODNER

Hurricane Floyd, the most damaging storm of 1999, was a good example of the collision of what might be called weather values and broadcast values—the need to give people an accurate forecast, on the one hand, and the desire to put on a good show, on the other. From a broadcasting point of view, Floyd was a perfect storm. Its frightful satellite image made its début on the national screens on Friday morning, September 10th, still fourteen hundred miles east of Florida, and then enjoyed several nights of analysis and commentary as it approached the United States, allowing the media time to deploy crews along the coast. By Tuesday, Floyd was the leading news story in the country. The Weather Channel set a new single-day ratings record, breaking the previous record it had set, on January 7, 1996, during "the Great Blizzard of '96." Weather.com, the Weather Channel's Web site, also set a record, with twenty-three and a half million page views on Tuesday. Broadcasters in every field were trying to get those satellite pictures of Floyd on the air. ("Entertainment Tonight" led with the storm on Wednesday, under the rubric "Stars Evacuate.") President Clinton cut short his stay in New Zealand, where he was trying to mediate in the East Timor crisis, and came home. Both Al Gore and George W. Bush made statements about the storm; Gore, looking to solidify his appeal as the weather candidate, even did a phone-in interview on the Weather Channel.

But none of the news coverage of Floyd helped much to prepare for the actual storm, and in some ways it may

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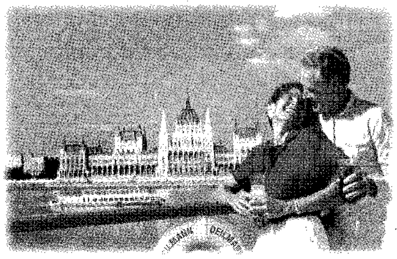

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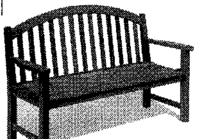

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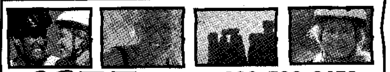

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have hindered preparation. The National Weather Service's Floyd forecast provoked the largest evacuation in American history, and it turned out that very few of the people who left their homes needed to go. Almost all the expensive beach houses that you saw on television were unharmed; it was the farmers inland who were wiped out by the flooding that followed the storm, and most people weren't prepared for that.

The N.W.S. forecast—made by government forecasters working in the much photographed National Hurricane Center, in Miami—declared that an extremely severe storm would slam into Charleston, South Carolina, on Wednesday night. So advised, I flew to Charleston on Tuesday to join a Weather Channel crew waiting for Floyd. My flight was full of nervous property owners and media people. A man behind me said he lived in Boston and had a weekend house on Folly Beach; he was flying down to board it up. "I always wanted a place on the beach, so I figured why not," he said. "But this is scary."

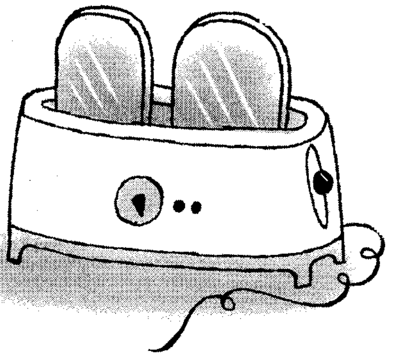
As the plane descended toward Charleston, I looked down at Interstate 26 and saw the largest traffic jam I have ever witnessed; even from five hundred feet the cars stretched as far as I could see to the red horizon. (The local paper later reported that it took people fifteen hours to go sixty miles.) The old motto of Charleston, "Come hell or high water," seemed to have yielded to a new motto: "If the Weather Channel says go, go."

Heading toward Folly, I had the eastbound side of the Interstate pretty much to myself. A religious program was on the radio; a caller was explaining that God could not be in the storm, because in the Bible Jesus condemns the storm, and he wouldn't do that if his own Father was in it, would he? This was interrupted by a news conference in which Governor Jim Hodges was upgrading the voluntary evacuation order to a mandatory order for all residents along the Intracoastal Waterway. All the hotels and stores in Charleston were closing, and by the time I arrived at the Folly Holiday Inn, where the Weather Channel crew was filming, it had nearly shut down.

I stood on Folly Beach and looked down the beautiful curve of sand with those expensive homes built cheek by jowl along it—the stacked chips of twenty fat years in the American economy, combined with a quiet period in major Atlantic hurricanes that now seemed to be coming to an end. I wandered a couple of streets back from the beach, into a funky-looking convenience store, called Bert's, that hadn't yet closed, and I loaded up on supplies, buying items I hadn't bought since I was a kid—Pop-Tarts, Nilla wafers, Hawaiian Punch. Most of the customers were surfers, who had come out for the waves. The checkout girl was looking up at the TV as she absent-mindedly bagged my purchases, and saying to no one in particular that she ought to get out to the beach to be interviewed by that dude from the Weather Channel.

Jeff Morrow, one of the channel's on-camera meteorologists, was at Folly Pier getting ready to do a live shot. (At the Weather Channel, a forecaster is called an O.C.M., although Morrow refers to himself as "the talent.") A freelance cameraman—wearing black jeans, no shoes, and a wild-man look you sometimes see in cameramen—was framing the shot in a digital Betacam. A second cameraman was out filming people getting ready for the hurricane: loading up on plywood, for instance, at the Home Depot, a major Weather Channel advertiser.

Morrow had a winning lack of cynicism about his job in the media. Because O.C.M.s cover bad weather, which is supposedly nobody's fault, they seem to be able to maintain a youthful enthusiasm. (Every single O.C.M. I met traced an interest in the weather back to childhood.) They also get an enthusiastic reception out in the field. "These Weather Channel guys are treated like frigging royalty," I was told by Bruce Fauzer, a satellite-truck operator who was working with Morrow on Floyd. "Usually, local people treat the media like scum—vultures preying on a disaster. But local people love these Weather Channel guys. When we were in North Carolina for Dennis"—the hurricane that had threatened the East Coast a week earlier—"people were coming to the truck with plates of ribs, cold drinks, pie, you name it. It was amazing."



In between updates from Morrow, the Weather Channel was broadcasting the National Weather Service's data. During storms, the Weather Channel gives much play to its tropical-storm experts—they include Dr. Steve Lyons and John Hope, the eighty-year-old Cronkite-style co-anchor of the Severe Weather Update desk. But, as far as severe-weather warnings go, the Weather Channel broadcasts only the National Weather Service's bulletin. (In times of an emergency, such as a hurricane, the N.W.S.'s forecast is supposed to be transmitted by all weather broadcasters.) Even if a staff meteorologist disagrees with that forecast, the channel will not break rank with the N.W.S., a practice the Weather Channel's vice-president, Ray Ban, chalks up to the importance of "being on the same page, weatherwise."

The National Weather Service's forecast was based in part on a computer model running on a Cray T-90 supercomputer at the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory, in Princeton. Another computer model, which is used by the European Center for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts, in London, was beginning to spit out a different forecast for Floyd, showing the storm weakening and turning north, and eventually making landfall near Wilmington, North Carolina, between fifty and seventy-five miles farther east than the N.W.S.'s predicted track of the storm in the eighteen to twenty-four hours preceding its arrival. The European forecast would prove correct, and by Tuesday night AccuWeather—which for the past thirty-eight years has sold forecasts to newspapers and TV and radio stations—had started to use that forecast, which its clients passed along to local markets. Elliot Abrams said that the same computer model had worked well with Hurricane Dennis, and "when a model has a hot hand you stay with it." But Weather Channel viewers weren't aware of the other forecast. I had spent the whole day with the Weather Channel, and I heard the correct forecast only when I got back to the hotel that night and turned on the local news.

I grew up at the agricultural end of New Jersey, which is still remarkably open country—lots of farms, few trees, and houses spaced half a mile or so apart. My father had been a farmer for most of his life, as had his father and grandfather, and we were acutely attuned to the weather as a kind of adversary—at best benign, at worst terrible and awesome in the Old Testament sense. In the summers, I worked for a local farmer, hauling sections of metal irrigation pipe among the rows of vegetables. When you're a mile or so from cover, carrying around thirty-foot-long conductive tubes, you become used to watching the sky for signs of bad weather: getting caught by a thunderstorm under a single lonely tree out there in the midst of all that space, and facing the real possibility that lightning will strike, fills you with a kind of terror you never quite forget.

At breakfast, my father would read out the weather report from the newspaper, and we would discuss whether it was good or bad for the crops. It was usually either too dry or too wet, or both, as happened in 1972, when Hurricane Agnes came up the East Coast and hit South Jersey. I remember the lines in one farmer's face as he surveyed his peppers, covered in two feet of salt water. The road we lived on used to be connected to a causeway that was taken out in a 1938 hurricane (the N.W.S. didn't start naming hurricanes until 1947), and I would ride my bike down there and look in wonder through the muddy water at the broken concrete slabs, disappearing into the muck and ooze.

Back then, in the seventies, the weather on TV was somewhat comic, partly because the notion that anyone could reliably predict the weather was still funny, and also because TV weathermen were more likely to be monologuists than meteorologists. David Letterman began his career as a weatherman, in Indiana, and his "Late Show" gags preserve the spirit of an era when weathermen would make hip-checking movements that, with any luck, would send an approaching low out to sea. Those days, when Willard Scott once read the forecast dressed as Carmen Miranda, are gone now, as, inspired by the Weather Channel's example, weathercasters have generally adopted the demeanor of a scientist rather than that of an entertainer.

I moved to New York City in the eighties. This common American experience, moving from farm to town, which in most families happened a generation or two ago, affects a person on many levels, but one of the most profound is the change in the weather. In my first New York apartment, which had a view of an alley and a fire escape, weather was no longer the Shakespearean epic of wind and sky it had been on the farm. Being weather-wise in the city means making weather inferences: seeing patches of sky between buildings and guessing what the rest might look like, or learning to measure wind speed by how violently the stop sign you can see from your office is rattling on its pole.

That's when I started watching TV weather. The satellite and Doppler-radar pictures that now illustrated the weather report were like really good views that I didn't have from my apartment. Images from the federal government's polar and geostationary weather satellites, maintained by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which hover twenty-two thousand miles above the earth, had begun to appear on television in the eighties, as had other pictures from the N.W.S.'s network of a hundred and sixty-one radar observation stations around the country. (In recent years, many broadcasters and private weather companies have invested in their own equipment; WNBC's much publicized Doppler radar is a large white ball sitting on top of Rockefeller Center.) Doppler radar was a crucial innovation and allowed forecasters to show the weather moving—particles in clouds coming toward the radar compress sound waves, while particles in clouds moving away expand them—rather than merely diagramming fronts with a grease pencil on a clear plastic board.

I became what's known in the weather industry as a "tracker." To be slouched in an armchair on a hot night on Long Island, with the lights off, windows open, mosquitoes flitting around the colored

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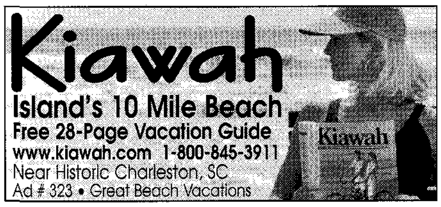

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"I've decided to return to my first passion in life—selling drugs to kids."

lights of the satellite pictures, watching a hurricane that is still a thousand miles out in the Atlantic and bearing down on Florida is my idea of good TV. My best tracking experience was Hurricane Bob, which came up the East Coast in August of 1991. This was the same weekend that the coup took place in Russia, and I spent a good deal of Sunday night clicking back and forth between the Weather Channel, which showed Bob approaching Long Island, and CNN, where Boris Yeltsin could be seen confronting the tanks. The old world order was breaking down, and the new order would be less stable, more chaotic—more like weather. Weather was becoming a metaphor for a kind of uncertainty that exists inside any very large system. Politics, once like war, would be like weather ("HURRICANE GEORGE!" screamed the headline in the *Post* in February, when W. won South Carolina). Media were becoming like weather, too—the way a big story crashed through the culture, submerging all other discourse in its storm surge of repetition, then disappearing quickly, leaving behind a weird deadness, like the aftermath of a big storm.

I went to the Weather Channel's headquarters, in Atlanta, in July, 1999, a visit that coincided with the beginning of a heat wave in New York. The day before I left, the *Times* reported that parts of the Sunrise Highway, on Long Island, had "liquefied" in the heat. The cab I took to the airport overheated on the Brooklyn Bridge, and the cabdriver, a Haitian, peering under the hood, made the washing motions with his hands I had seen *tut-tut* drivers in Port-au-Prince use when their wretched machines broke down. I proceeded toward Tillary Street on foot, trying to stick to the curb on the inside of the roadway, but the hardy little bushes growing out of the concrete were sooty and began to begrime the khaki pants I was planning to wear the next day to the Weather Channel, so I moved off the curb and was now loping along on the roadway, inside the turn—a bad place to be. It occurred to me that this is how you get killed by the weather in New York City. I managed to reach the airport in time, only to find that the flight had been cancelled. Explanation? "Weather."

When the Weather Channel went on the air, in 1982, it seemed like a bad idea. The morning shows like "Today" and "Good Morning America" did a national weather report, but generally gave it no more than a couple of minutes. People liked to watch weather on TV—the weather forecast had long been the most popular part of the local news—but who would be desperate or idle enough to watch a twenty-four-hour weather channel, mostly featuring weather in other parts of the country or the world? Today, the Weather Channel seems like a great idea. Tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, thunderstorms, blizzards—who doesn't like to watch that stuff? Fifteen million people tune in to the Weather Channel at least once a day, and the service, which is now in more than seventy-four million homes, reportedly generated about a hundred million dollars in operating profits in 1998.

The idea came from John Coleman, a weathercaster on "Good Morning America" in the nineteen-seventies. Coleman, tired of having his weather time taken away by celebrity coverage, was convinced that people would watch a lot more weather if they could. He advocated a no-frills approach, with none of the jokiness of network weather, and a lot more science and analysis. (Coleman was himself a veteran of happy weather: residents of Chicago, where Coleman was a weatherman before going to "Good Morning America," remember his threat to do the forecast standing on his head if it rained one more day.) He took his idea to Frank Batten, the chairman of Landmark Communications, a privately held company based in Norfolk, Virginia, which owns the Roanoke *Times*, among other media properties, and Landmark agreed to finance the channel.

Coleman had envisaged a purely national channel, but Landmark insisted on including regional broadcasts in order to sell the channel in local markets (which still account for a large part of the Weather Channel's advertising revenue), and developed a technology that allowed the channel to intersperse regional fore-

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FRIDAY MAY 5TH

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FICTION READINGS

Sherman Alexie and Nick Hornby
8 P.M. Theatre for the New City

Donald Antrim and Annie Proulx
8 P.M. Altman Building

Julian Barnes and Muriel Spark
8 P.M. Wollman Auditorium at Cooper Union

Junot Díaz and George Saunders
8 P.M. Pravda

Tony Earley and Edna O'Brien
8 P.M. Joe's Pub

Deborah Eisenberg and Tobias Wolff
7 P.M. The Bitter End

Richard Ford and Alice Munro
8 P.M. Angel Orensanz Foundation

Jonathan Franzen and Cynthia Ozick
8 P.M. The Players

Matthew Klam and Stephen King
7 P.M. Bowery Ballroom

Jhumpa Lahiri and William Trevor
8 P.M. Glucksman Ireland House

Chang-rae Lee and Jeanette Winterson
8 P.M. Tonic

Antonya Nelson and T. Coraghessan Boyle
8 P.M. Mercury Lounge

Zadie Smith
(a second reader to be announced)
9:30 P.M. Bowery Ballroom

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SATURDAY MAY 6TH

PERFORMANCES
INTERVIEWS
DISCUSSIONS

Tickets for all daytime events are $15. Tickets for the Saturday-night New Yorker humor revue are $25 and $35.

WRITERS AND THEIR SUBJECTS

Calvin Trillin on Calvin Trillin
11 A.M. American Place Theatre

Mark Singer and Ricky Jay
1 P.M. Celebrity Room at the Friars Club
SOLD OUT

John Lahr on Noël Coward (with a special appearance by Elaine Stritch)
3 P.M. Morgan Library

Adam Gopnik on Saul Steinberg
4 P.M. Auditorium, Equitable Center

THE NEW YORKER "IN CONVERSATION WITH"

Paul Simon interviewed by David Remnick
1 P.M. Auditorium, Equitable Center

Kofi Annan interviewed by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
2 P.M. Princeton Club

Philip Hamburger interviewed by Mary Gordon
3 P.M. New Dramatists

Jon Stewart interviewed by David Remnick
4 P.M. American Place Theatre

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Annals of Business
Is big business bad for the Internet?
11 A.M. Princeton Club

Annals of Politics
The Presidential campaign.
11 A.M. Newseum/NY

Annals of Journalism
The life and work of Joseph Mitchell.
11 A.M. Morgan Library

Annals of Medicine
Fear of illness.
4 P.M. Princeton Club

Annals of Writing
Young writers.
4 P.M. Float

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Steve Earle with Bill Buford and Nick Hornby
1 P.M. Float

Suzanne Farrell with Joan Acocella
2 P.M. City Center

V. S. Naipaul with Bill Buford
4 P.M. Princeton Club

ARCHITECTURAL TOUR

Fifteen Buildings That Changed New York
with Paul Goldberger
Bus leaves Saks Fifth Avenue at 1 P.M.
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THE NEW YORKER HUMOR REVUE

An original work by ***Wendy Wasserstein.***
8 P.M. Town Hall

SUNDAY MAY 7TH

BRUNCH
CONVERSATIONS
POETRY IN THE PARK

Tickets for brunches are $30. Tickets for all other events are $15. No tickets are necessary for the poetry reading in Bryant Park.

SUNDAY BRUNCH

Broadway Brunch with John Lahr
Life in the theatre.
11:30 A.M. Grand Ballroom at the Manhattan Center

Cartoon Brunch with New Yorker Cartoonists
Eggs funny-side up.
10 A.M. Café SFA, Saks Fifth Avenue
SOLD OUT

Crime Brunch with Pete Hamill
Murder strikes back.
11:30 A.M. Pershing Square Café

Film Brunch with David Denby
The pitfalls of indie success.
11 A.M. The Screening Room

Jazz Brunch with Special Guests
The contemporary masters.
12:30 P.M. Birdland

WRITERS AND THEIR SUBJECTS

Robin Williams interviewed by Lillian Ross
1 P.M. Juilliard Theatre

Frank Gehry interviewed by Paul Goldberger
4 P.M. Condé Nast cafeteria
SOLD OUT

PANEL DISCUSSION

Annals of War
Sixty years of war correspondence.
1 P.M. Yale Club

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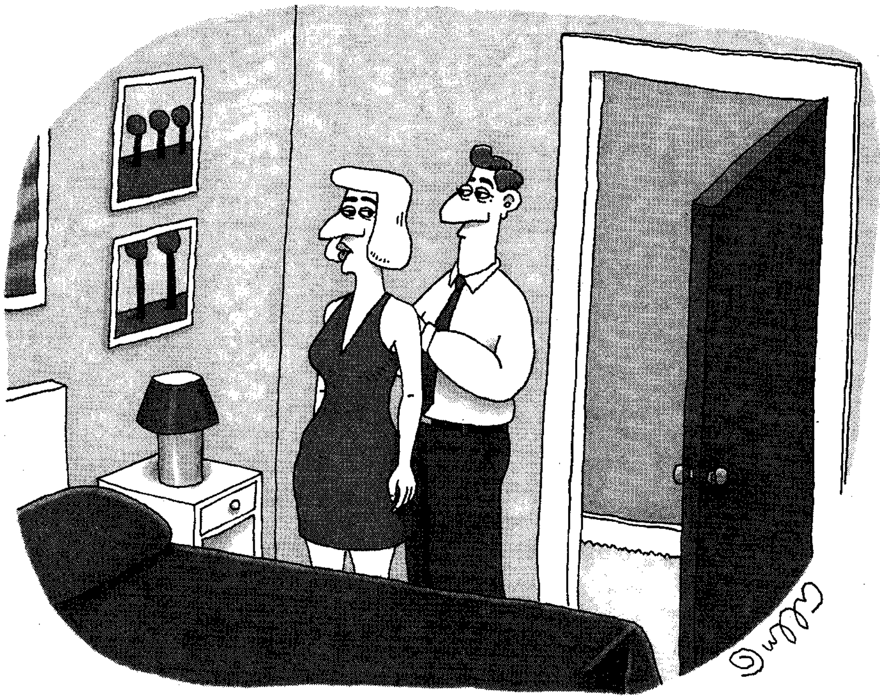
In its first season, though, the Weather Channel lost more than ten million dollars and generated headlines like "WHEN IT RAINS IT BORES." The graphics were crude, Doppler radar hadn't been invented yet, and the programming was monotonous. Coleman, who was the president of the company, departed in 1983, after disagreements with Landmark about how the business should be run. (That year he filed a lawsuit against Landmark, but the matter was settled out of court.) After Coleman's departure, the Weather Channel began receiving significant subscriber fees from cable providers, and this helped make the business more viable.

It was its coverage of a hurricane—Elena, in 1985—that first brought the Weather Channel widespread public attention. Though the original aim was to cover weather in a sober, scientific manner, the Weather Channel noticed that there was a ratings spike whenever a big storm came along. By the time Hugo hit South Carolina, in 1989, the Weather Channel had become the source to turn to during weather emergencies. Four years later, Hurricane Andrew extended that reputation. Now you can tune in to "Hurricane Season" (it lasts almost as long as hockey season, from June 1st to November 30th), "Tornado Season," "Nor'easter Season," and "Winter Storm Season."

Weather Channel meteorologists use National Weather Service satellite and radar pictures, which are made available by the N.W.S. for a relatively modest access fee, to illustrate their national weather reports. These images are often further colorized to show the density of the cloud tops in different shades—red at the core, pulsing orange around that, and beyond that a malignant-looking purple, a new color in the Weather Channel's 1999 palette. (These colorized pictures—whether they're of hurricanes or mere "T-cell activity," as they say on the Weather Channel—may not always be accurate depictions of how severe a storm is on the ground. But the pictures look frightening. When they look really frightening, as was the case with Floyd, people leave their homes.)

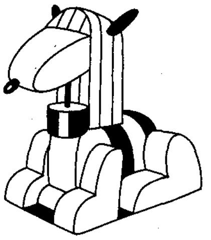
Any hour of programming generally follows the same format. At the top of the hour is "Weather Center," a seven-minute roundup of the nation's weather, followed by four minutes of "Travel Wise," aimed at business travellers, and four minutes of the "Weekly Planner," which offers forecasts of up to seven days. There's another "Weather Center" on the half-hour, and "Storm Watch" at fifty minutes past the hour. Much of the information is the same—it's only the context that changes. You know this, but you watch anyway, rendered impassive by the mind-numbing repetition of it all. A research study commissioned by Chiat/Day identified the channel's addictive potential. When regular viewers were denied access for more than a week, Jerry Gentile, Chiat/Day's creative director, told the Washington *Post*, "these people just sort of broke. They couldn't get their lives together without watching the weather. They had to know. They had to have control. They couldn't just look out the window."



"By breaking the seal on this dress, you accept the terms and conditions printed on my panties."

The voices of the O.C.M.s add to the channel's calming effect. They all strike the same tone—pleasant but not jokey, confident but never knowing. (Recently, I said to a friend of mine, "Looks like snow," and instead of scratching his chin, squinting at the clouds, and saying, "Yep," he said, "Actually, this clipper is going to blow through here, moving this low out to sea, and tomorrow the picture looks pretty clear," and I could tell what he'd been watching that morning.) Lee Grenci, a meteorologist at Penn State who helps to write the weather page for the *Times* (which recently unveiled its new expanded format and color graphics), told me that freshmen who come to meteorology school "already sound like little minions of the Weather Channel. Same language, same descriptions, same body movements. It's almost Orwellian. Though I have to say the Weather Channel has increased enrollment in meteorological school."

Almost every meteorologist I spoke to, both inside and outside the Weather Channel, brought up the Internet and the way it is changing the weather business, by making information once available only to experts accessible to everyone. (According to the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, in 1998 weather was the No. 1 form of news that people looked for on line.) In spite of blunders like the Surprise Storm, forecasting has continued to improve—today's three-day temperature forecast is as accurate as a one-day temperature forecast was thirty years ago, and the ability to pinpoint a hurricane's location has improved by more than a day, according to Ron McPherson, the executive director of the American Meteorological Society. Computer models, though not infallible or always consistent, have become steadily more reliable as the machines they run on grow in processing power, and as more data are fed into the system. And, thanks to the Net, the average weather enthusiast can now take his pick from as many as eight computer models showing various scenarios for the same region in the United States.



There are more than a hundred private weather companies in the United States, and all have been confronted by this new world of ubiquitous weather information. One popular strategy is to offer weather forecasts tailored to the needs of a particular commercial enterprise. “Let's say you're a cement pourer,” Elliot Abrams, of AccuWeather, told me, “and you want to do a big pour on a particular day. So you make a contract with us, and you call us and tell us where you're pouring the cement, and we tell you what the forecast will be.”

Long-range weather forecasting is another growing business. An on-line venture, www.weatherplanner.com, offers a free service aimed at people who are planning weddings, vacations, or other outdoor events. Type in the date and the location and you can get a whole year's worth of predictions on your screen. Weatherplanner's parent company, Strategic Weather Services, also uses long-range weather forecasting, along with demographic and market analysis, to make predictions up to a year in advance for corporations that need to plan ahead. Many meteorologists scoff at the idea of predicting the weather that far in advance. Strategic Weather Services will not comment on its methods, but its approach derives from theories about recurring weather patterns developed by Dr. Irving P. Krick, a colorful mid-century physicist, which have long been in favor in the military (Eisenhower employed these theories in the Second World War, and meteorologists from Strategic Weather Services advised Norman Schwarzkopf in the Gulf War). The company's clients have included Sears (lawnmowers and house paint), Duraflame (logs), Arctic Cat (snowmobiles), and K mart (garden hoses, barbecues, and patio furniture).

Another emerging trend in the weather business is the trading of weather futures and derivatives—financial instruments offered to companies as a hedge against extreme weather (or “extreme mildness,” if you happen to be in a bad-weather business). The weather officially began to be treated like a commodity when the Chicago Mercantile Exchange opened a market in weather futures on September 22, 1999, in which the investor can bet on how far the temperature in certain cities on a given day will fall below or rise above sixty-five degrees (known, respectively, as heating-degree days or cooling-degree days). A former commodities trader who now runs a weather-derivatives business told me that many brokerage firms have established weather desks, providing a new and lucrative source of employment for the hundreds of meteorological B.A.s who graduate each year.

The Weather Channel seems well positioned in this new information-drenched weatherscape, because it has never relied as much on forecasting as most weather businesses. The Weather Channel's real competition is less other weather companies than other cable channels, such as CNBC and CNN, with which it competes for a free-floating audience of people who spend the day with their television sets on, ready to click to the appropriate channel if some extraordinary event or disaster occurs, be it human or natural. And, as weather coverage has increased on the networks and the cable news stations, the Weather Channel has adopted a more news-driven approach. It covered the war in Kosovo, when the bombing began, because the weather was a factor (cloudy skies inhibited the air strikes). It also covered the J.F.K., Jr., tragedy—weather again—and now routinely covers airplane crashes, which it was not doing five years ago. It has begun doing live reports from some major golf tournaments, and last season started report-

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ing the weather on Fox's N.F.L. pregame show. On Super Bowl Sunday, the Weather Channel brought viewers constant updates on the weather in Atlanta, which was not exactly relevant to the game—it was played inside—but which did allow it to show plenty of pictures of an O.C.M. in the parking lot of the Georgia Dome.

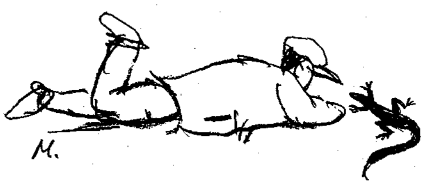
When I was in Atlanta, I spoke with the executive vice-president of marketing for the Weather Channel, Steven Schiffman. We met in his office, which is filled with mementos that he brought along from his previous job, at Kraft. There was a miniature Kraft Singles tractor-trailer, some plastic cheese slices, and other cheese-related knickknacks. Schiffman made it clear that his approach to selling weather was pretty much the same as his approach to selling cheese. He told me that on taking over his job, in 1998, he'd commissioned a new "segmentation study" into the "need states" of the audience, and the study came up with three basic types of Weather Channel user. (At the Weather Channel, market research is cited at every opportunity.) The first group, the weather-engaged, who make up forty-one per cent of the audience, "know the weather statistics like sports fans know a star's batting average," Schiffman told me. The second group, the weather planners, who form twenty-eight per cent of the audience, "are scheduling flights, or golf games with clients on a Saturday, and want to plan ahead." The remaining thirty-one per cent, the commodity users, "just want their forecast, as quickly as possible. They don't care if it's raining in California." Schiffman foresaw potential for growth among the commodity users, whom he compared to the "cheese rejecters" he had to contend with when he was at Kraft.

Down the hall from Schiffman's office, CNN and the Weather Channel were playing on separate TVs, but both were showing a picture of a burning apartment building, right there in Atlanta. It had been struck by lightning the previous night—part of the same line of unsettled weather I had flown through. The Weather Channel is keen to find ways in which to increase its use of news footage, in part to get away from showing nothing but meteorologists standing in front of maps. As Patrick Scott, an executive vice-president, explained to me, "If there's a flood in Georgia and someone drowns, CNN will say, 'Man dies in flood,' while we'll say, 'There's been flooding and it's so bad one man has died.' But we can use the same picture CNN is using."

The Weather Channel has to be careful here, however, because, as it widens the context of weather to include more news, it risks compromising what makes viewers loyal to the channel: the belief that they're getting just the facts, delivered not to help ratings but for the good of the community. "People trust us," Schiffman said, "because we're doing the weather, not the disaster." Weather in this case means something reassuringly straightforward, helpful, and civic-minded. It is not like news, which traffics in disaster and misery for its own sake. Traditionally, where the Weather Channel has drawn the line between weather and news is in covering the aftermath of a storm. "We haven't done much aftermath, because then it's news," Schiffman told me. He nodded toward the burning apartment building. "We're trying to figure out a way of doing more of it."

In January, the channel introduced "Your Weather Today," a two-hour morning show that's closer to the network breakfast shows than the Weather Channel's usual programming. (After ten weeks on the air the show is the highest-rated cable news program on TV.) Instead of a rotating cast of on-camera meteorologists, there are the same two every day, with their coffee cups, doing the weather. The Weather Channel's founder, John Coleman, fled "Good Morning America" because ratings-grabbing fluff kept taking time away from the weather. With "Your Weather Today," it is as if the idea has come full circle: a morning show in which the weather itself is the fluff.

There's a paradox at the heart of the weather report today: people watch weather on TV because it seems real, in a way that political scandals and stock-market gyrations sometimes do not. But the more weather we watch on TV the less time we spend in it. One becomes attuned to the movement of energy around the globe—the jet stream, the flow of high pressure down from the North Pole, the path of the storm—while at the same time becoming detached from the weather outside.



I remember standing on the battery in Charleston, South Carolina, waiting for Floyd: Wednesday, September 15, 1999. The old town was eerily deserted, the windows of the great Georgian houses protected by plywood cut into neoclassical shapes. TV crews were lined up all along the stone promenade: weather paparazzi straining before the velvet rope of the ocean, waiting for the celebrity to arrive. A Weather Channel producer, Dwight Woods, tried the shot: Charleston Bay, with Fort Sumter in the background. He didn't like it, and decided to see whether a marina that Bruce Fauzer, the satellite-truck operator, had scouted out earlier offered better pictures. As Jeff Morrow, the meteorologist, was climbing into the truck, he pointed at the sky and said, "By the way, there's the hurricane."

I looked up, and there it was. You could see the cloud, a huge dark plume that went up at least fifty thousand feet into the atmosphere. It was astounding, almost Biblical in size, especially in contrast to the televised satellite picture I had been seeing for so long. Television simply can't convey the immensity of weather—that feeling you get just from looking up at the sky.

The crew set up near the marina, under the covered courtyard of a deserted Hampton Inn, just outside Charleston. Fauzer had parked the truck between the hotel and a boat warehouse. At around 3 P.M., the skyline of downtown Charleston went dark: the power had gone out. Even though the hurricane's eye was going to miss us, gusts of wind from the squall band were already too strong to stand up straight in, and the rain stung like ice crystals. The light was very dim, and the air was beginning to fill with debris. Suddenly an especially strong blast blew the ceiling tiles out of the Hampton Inn canopy and knocked over a bank of lights, which knocked over the camera. On the Weather Channel, this looked splendid—very "Blair Witch"—but, unfortunately, it broke the camera.

By nine that night, the storm in Charleston was at its peak. The boat warehouse next to the Hampton Inn was beginning to blow apart. The skyline was dark, but once in a while there was a bright-green flash—another transformer, the metal box toward the top of certain telephone poles, had exploded as the lines blew together and opposite charges arced between them. Everyone was packed into the truck, which was now thoroughly damp, and cold from the air-conditioning. Outside, the wind roared like a train.

"Let's make live TV!" Fauzer cried, firing up the troops. He flung on his foul-weather gear and bounded out into the storm.

Morrow and the cameraman followed him into the full force of the wind to do the shot. As they were shooting, there was a tremendous crash in the darkness nearby. A forty-foot gooseneck street light had blown over.

"What was that?" Morrow shouted, flinching from the deadly wind.

"Show it!" shouted Fauzer, who had returned to the truck. "Let's see it!"

"These things can become missiles," Morrow said to the viewers, glancing around. It was great live TV, but not great weather. The next day, Bryan Norcross, a Miami-based weatherman who made headlines for broadcasting in Hurricane Andrew, said in *USA Today* that he thought it was only a matter of time before the nation saw a weatherman decapitated on live TV. Would that be news or weather?

I was in Washington, D.C., on March 8th, when the temperature hit a high of eighty-five degrees. As I watched the weathercaster on NewsChannel 8 crowing over the shattered records and telling us how lucky we were, I was struck by the extent to which coverage of the weather, in spite of all the newsier innovations, is still rooted in the happy weather of the sixties and seventies, when storms, heat waves, and blizzards were a cheerful alternative to the body count in Vietnam, racial unrest in the cities, and soaring crime rates.

Global warming—without doubt the biggest weather story of our time—is almost never discussed on the weather report. "They don't really want us to talk about the causes of global warming," Buzz Bernard, one of the Weather Channel's meteorologists, told me. The position of the Weather Channel is that if you look at the last thirty years the evidence that the planet has grown warmer has nearly reached scientific consensus, and we may be at the warmest point in the last hundred years. But whether this warming is a result of environmental or human influences is still not known, nor is it clear how long the warming cycle we are now in will last. Stu Ostro, a senior meteorologist at the Weather Channel, told me, "Once you say global warming is caused by human means, you have to say whose fault is it, and what do you do about it, and then you're in a very difficult political situation."

Opinions concerning the causes of global warming remain highly contentious. But many climatologists now believe that rising temperatures produce more extreme weather—not only more frequent heat waves and droughts but also more storms and floods. Thomas Karl, the director of the National Climatic Data Center, a branch of NOAA, recently completed a study of extreme weather in the United States since 1910. Karl, who was for a long time the darling of global-warming skeptics, concluded in the study that there has been "a persistent increase in extreme events" since the nineteen-seventies—an anomaly he attributes to global warming.

On television, however, when it comes to the subject of global warming, Ben Franklin's cheerful optimism—the dominant tone of his *Poor Richard's Almanac*—still rules over the dour spirit of Increase Mather's "Remarkable Providences." Perhaps that's good science—the time frame of climate change is far beyond that of a daily forecast—but it nonetheless works to intensify our superstitions concerning weird weather, because we get only spectacle without any scientific explanation whatsoever. And an ever-growing focus on short-term dramas further dulls our capacity to follow long-term changes.

The news about the weather—that it's hot and getting hotter, and that our species may be contributing to the problem—is not the kind of bad news people want to hear in a weather forecast, and so they don't hear it. And that is why, when the weatherman mentions the oddly balmy temperatures, he usually tells us to "get out there and enjoy it." ♦

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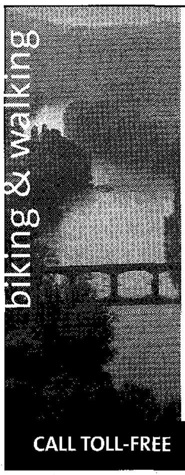

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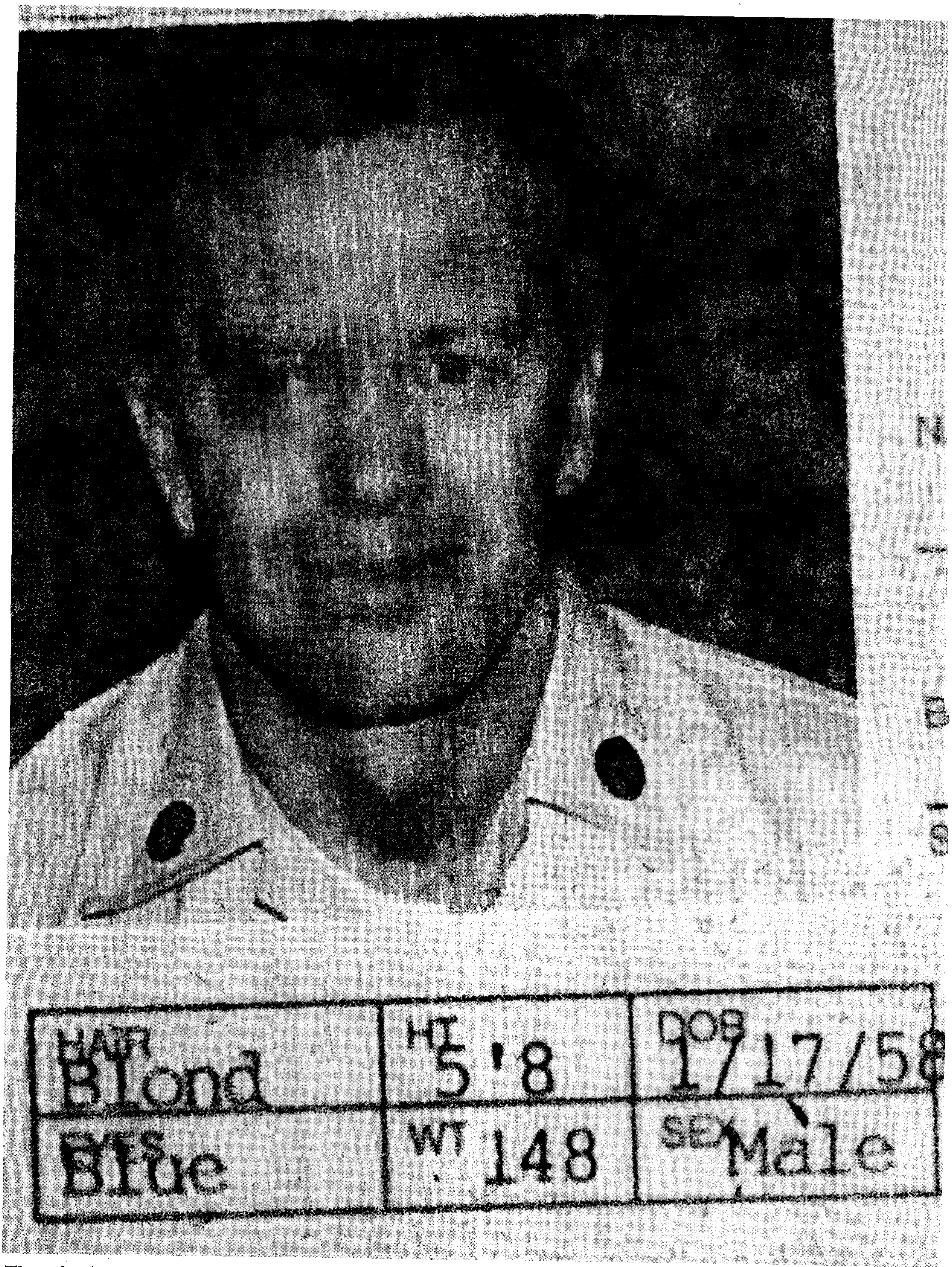
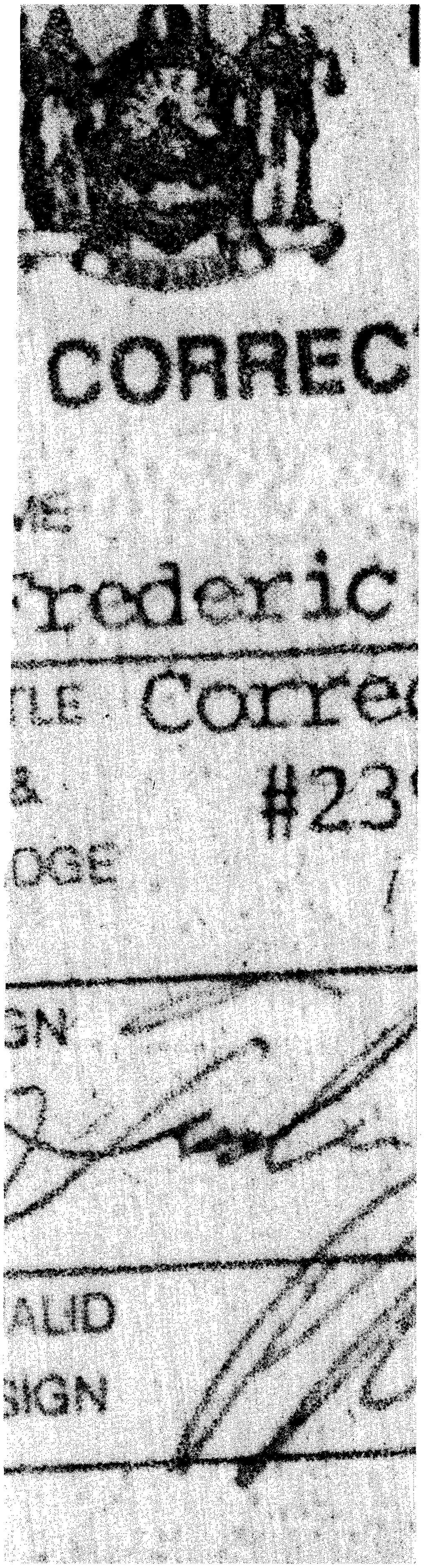


HAIR Blond	HT 5'8	DOB 1/17/58
EYES Blue	WT 148	SEX Male

The author (whose given name is Frederic, as it appears on his New York State Department of Correctional Services ID card) had been



warned that Sing Sing is a chaotic place to work.

COURTESY RANDOM HOUSE

A REPORTER AT LARGE

GUARDING SING SING

A firsthand account of the dysfunctional relationship between guards and inmates.

BY TED CONOVER

"Take your shirt off, please. Show me your hands, both sides. Now arms away from your body. Turn around."

"O.K." We nod that we're finished and move on to the next cell. The inmate there has heard us coming and wants to know why.

"Just do it, please."

"And what if I don't?"

"The sergeant will come, and they'll write you up." The man sighs, shrugs, pulls his T-shirt over his head, does the dance.

The cellblock is locked down, and we're looking for knife cuts. The Latin Kings have been attacking the Bloods, and vice versa. Not en masse—just stealth encounters, stabbings without warning. One incident provokes the next. The lockdowns are in their third day, but each time we let the inmates out, another one of them gets attacked.

The sergeant wouldn't say why we were conducting upper-body frisks, but it doesn't take a genius: the white shirts (prison slang for the senior officers) think that at least one participant in the latest cutting exchange, though wounded, avoided detection. So we're looking for blood, skin that needs stitching, a gash from a homemade blade.

In the next cell, the inmate is lying on his bunk.

"R-63, take off your shirt, please."

He sits up, bleary-eyed, then stands, removes the shirt. Like many inmates, he's in excellent shape from weightlifting. And, like many inmates, he has scars: three inches long on his waist below the ribs, about one inch long on his arm, penny-size circles that look like two bullet wounds on a shoulder blade.

"Nothing fresh," says the officer I'm with, more to himself than in dismissal. He's an old-timer who doubts we'll find anything and acts like he's seen it all before. I'm not so world-weary. The huge quantity of scars surprises me. Half the inmates in Sing Sing seem to have been stabbed or shot at some point in their lives. Often the scars are on the face: a pale thick line across the back of the skull where no hair grows, a sliced nostril imperfectly healed, a gash along a cheek which ended when the blade passed through a lip. The most ghastly wound is on a man who looks about nineteen: a ragged cicatrix that winds from one corner of his mouth to beneath his left ear, then all the way around his head, under the right ear, and back to the other corner of the mouth, as though the assailant intended to peel off the top. A sadist's trophy.

We continue down the line, looking at gash after gash, but nothing fresh.

The Sing Sing Correctional Facility sprawls across fifty-five acres of the east bank of the Hudson River, some thirty miles north of New York City. Convicted criminals used to travel from the city to Sing Sing by boat "up the river" to "the big house," which is how both phrases entered the language. The prison's name was borrowed from the Sint Sinck Indians, who once inhabited the site. It may have meant "stone upon stone," which describes the rocky slope that the prison is built upon. When I arrived for work each morning, around six-fifteen, I parked in a flat area between the river and the Metro-North tracks, hard up against the prison wall. Just over the wall is the abandoned stone shell of the original cellblock, which was built in 1826. The former death house, in which six hundred and fourteen inmates, including Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, were electrocuted between 1891 and 1963, is down there, too. It has been converted into a vocational building with print, drafting, woodworking, and welding shops. Old Sparky, the electric chair, was sent to a museum in Virginia, and death row has become an inmate-orientation room. There are no plaques or commemorative signs. The only links to the past are the memories of guards like the man who once showed me where the chair had been, and the switch, and the so-called Dance Hall—I thought I recognized it from a James Cagney movie—that condemned inmates passed through on their last walk.

I parked next to my friend Aragon, who always put the Club on his steering wheel. This puzzled me, since, with a heavily armed wall tower just a few yards away, this has to be one of the safest places to leave your car in Westchester County. But Aragon was a little lock-crazy: he had screwed a tiny hasp onto his plastic lunchbox and hung a combination lock from it, because, he said, of the sodas he'd lost to pilfering officers.

Most correction officers park in lots up the hill, near the Administration Building, but it's almost impossible for a new officer to get a locker there, so I used the men's locker room in the former heating plant next to the railroad tracks, where only about twenty of the two hundred lockers are in use; the rest have locks on them belonging to officers who quit or transferred or died or who knows what. Nobody keeps track. An old wall phone hangs upside down by its wires on the left as you enter, the receiver dangling by a curly cord. During my second month on the job, I found one lock that was so flimsy I could almost twist it off with my hands. Inside the locker were plastic cups, photographs of women in bikinis torn out of magazines, newspapers from 1983.

Around six-thirty, fifteen minutes till lineup, I would put on my gray polyester uniform and make sure I'd got all the things I needed on my belt: radio holder, latex-glove packet, two key-ring clips, baton ring. I put a pen and a pad, an inmate rule book, and a blue union diary in my breast pocket, slid my baton through the ring, locked the padlock, and slammed the locker door. Then I walked past a pile of old office desks and, usually, went into the men's room, which smells like an outhouse. Every morning my stomach let me know, just before the shift started, what it thought of this job.

The desk of Sergeant Ed Holmes is the focal point of the lineup room. It's on a raised platform, in front of a window in the Administration Building. From up there, Holmes can see everybody who's in the room and most of those who are ascending the front steps. His eyes move constantly, never settling on any person or object for more than an instant, going from the officers to the printout in front of him and back again. The printout tells him what jobs he'll need to fill—who's on his day off, who's got vacation, who's out sick, who's on suspension. He checks off old-timers as he sees them—they've reserved their posts and know where they're going. It's the new guys, rookie officers like me—we were called "new jacks" by the inmates—who are at his mercy.

Holmes is one of the tough black officers who have been at Sing Sing forever, a big man who seems to enjoy his distance from the rank and file. "Don't fuck with me," he said during orientation, my first week on the job. "I'm gonna give you your job assignment, and if you complain I'll give you a worse one tomorrow. I'm not nice. Don't fuck with me."

A stint at Sing Sing, with its decaying plant and reputation for chaos, is a sort of rite of passage for New York State correction officers. "Everybody's got to do their time at the bottom of the barrel" was how a union representative had put it to my class at the correction academy in Albany. We had trained for seven weeks, and then were sent directly into battle, so to speak. "Three months at Sing Sing is like three years anywhere else," the union rep had said.

Usually, I was sent to A-block or B-block, massive human warehouses that are among the largest prison housing units in the world, with more than a thousand inmates between them. I lived for the exceptions: the easy day in the wall tower, barbershop, or hospital; or an escort job. Escort officers get to leave the cellblock for chunks of the day, taking groups of inmates to the mess hall and other parts of the prison. The officers who run the floors where inmates live—the galleries—have to stay there for the whole shift. Galleries are understaffed, and the officers on them, surrounded by inmates all day, are run ragged. It's where new officers get sent.

B-block feels like the remotest part of Sing Sing. There are a couple of ways to get there; both involve a lot of stairs. In the morning, we would march along slowly, sipping coffee from paper cups in one hand, hanging onto lunch bags with the other. The corridors and stairways are old, often in disrepair, and are neither heated nor air-conditioned. When it rained, we skirted puddles created by leaks in the tile roofs. The corridors snake around, joining the various buildings, and at the beginning and end of each of them—sometimes even in the middle—there is a locked gate. Most of the officers posted to these gates have big thick keys, but at one gate the guard pushes buttons instead, as they do in modern prisons. By the time we passed through the heavy front door of B-block, there were ten locked gates between us and freedom.

A-block and B-block are the most impressive buildings in Sing Sing. One wonders how a democratic society could commission such horrific structures, and how a debased enough architect could be found to draw up a plan. They are stupefyingly vast, and you come upon them with no preamble. There is no wide staircase or arched entryway leading to them, just the corridor and then a pair of solid metal doors, neither of them much bigger than the front door of the average house. A-block, which is probably the largest freestanding cellblock in the world, is five hundred and eighty-eight feet long, twelve feet shy of two football fields. There are some six hundred and eighty inmates in there, more than the entire population of many prisons. You can hear them—an overwhelming cacophony of radios, of heavy gates slamming, of shouts and whistles and running footsteps—but, oddly at first, you can't see a single incarcerated soul. All you see is the bars that form the narrow fronts of the cells, extending four stories up and so far into the distance on the left and right that they melt into an illusion of solidity. Then, as you walk down the gallery, eighty-eight cells long, the human dimensions of the place become clear. There might be a half-dozen small mirrors thrust through the bars, and the arms holding them retract as you draw even. Some of the inmates make eye contact and glare, others doze, some sit bored on the toilet.

Both A-block and B-block were completed in 1929, and they're practically identical, except that B-block is twenty cells shorter (sixty-eight), and one story taller (five). The design is typical of American prisons: tiny cells back-to-back on tiers, with stairways on either end and in the center. Each cellblock consists of two practically separate components. One is the all-metal interior, containing the tiers of cells; it's painted gray, and looks as though it could have been welded in a shipyard. The other element is a huge brick-and-concrete shell that fits over the tiers like a dish over a stick of butter. One does not touch the other. A series of tall, barred windows runs down either side of the shell; they would let in twice as much light if they were washed. As it is, they let pass a diffuse, smog-colored glow, which crosses about fifteen feet of open space on each side before it reaches the metal, which it does not warm. The flat, leaky roof of the shell is maybe ten feet from the top of the metal cellblock. If the whole structure were radically shrunk, the uninitiated might perceive a vaguely agricultural purpose: the cages could be thought to contain chickens, or mink. The cellblocks are loud because they are hard. There is nothing in them to absorb sound, except the inmates' thin mattresses and perhaps their own bodies. Every other surface is metal or concrete or brick.

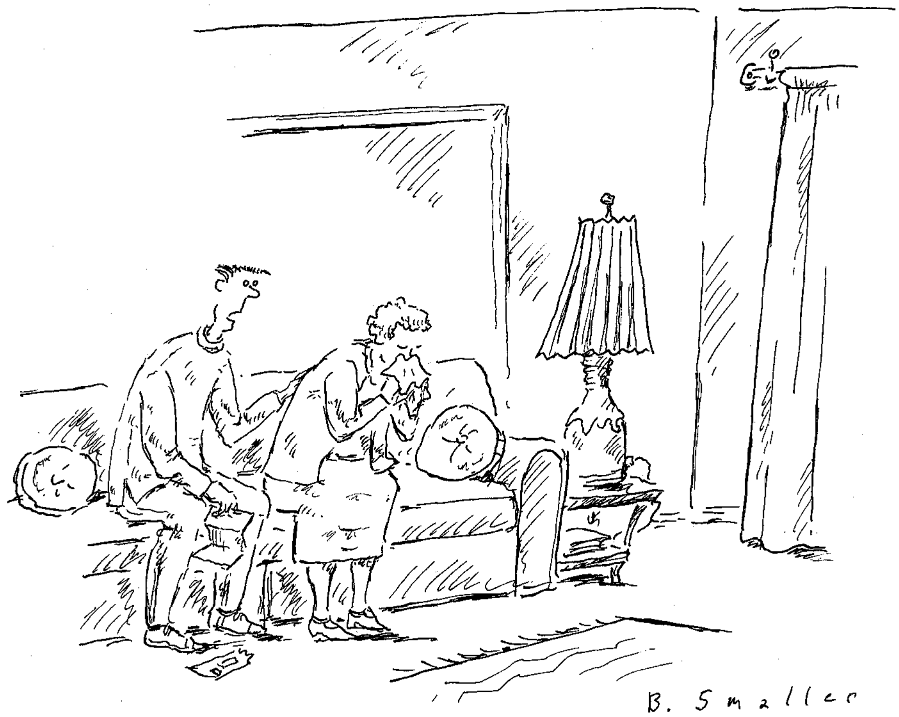
Since the demise of apartheid in South Africa, the former No. 1 jailer, the United States has run neck-and-neck with Russia in the race to become the world leader in rates of imprisonment. We lock up six times as many citizens per capita as England, seventeen times as many as Japan. Prisons and jails in the United States now hold nearly two million people, meaning that one out of every hundred and forty residents is behind bars. In the nineties, while Wall Street was booming, a third of the black men in this country between the ages of twenty and twenty-nine were either incarcerated or on probation or parole.

New York's seventy prisons are scattered across the state. Among them are maximum-security prisons—including Sing Sing, Attica (in western New York, near Buffalo), Auburn (mid-state), and Clinton (in the northern Adirondacks, near Canada)—and a variety of medium-security, minimum-security, and work-release facilities. (State prisons hold people who are incarcerated for a year or more. Inmates awaiting trial or serving shorter terms stay in local jails, such as the giant Rikers Island complex in New York City, near LaGuardia Airport. Federal prisons generally house criminals convicted of federal crimes—often drug dealers.)

Fifty-two of these prisons were built in the last twenty-seven years, a period in which the number of inmates has increased nearly sixfold, from twelve thousand five hundred to more than seventy thousand, owing in large part to mandatory sentencing laws for drug offenses. The majority of the inmates are young men of color from New York City. Because the state government is based in Albany, however, and the state senate is dominated by politicians from rural precincts, nearly all the prison construction has been outside the city, where job-hungry communities clamor for it. A state salary goes far in small-town New York. After correction officers have been on the job for eight years, they make nearly forty thousand dollars annually and enjoy numerous job benefits. Most of these officers, like most of the people in upstate New York, are white.

Both inmates and younger officers tend to be on the move. Inmates are often shifted, with little notice, between facilities. Officer recruits spend seven weeks at the training academy in Albany, as I did, and then may spend several years trying to get posted closer to home. Their first assignment is generally Sing Sing, which always needs staff, because most correction officers can't afford to live in Westchester County and because of Sing Sing's reputation for being run-down and disorganized. (Since it is so close to New York City, it is unusual among state prisons in having a predominantly nonwhite permanent staff.) The more desirable prisons have seniority-based waiting lists of up to several years.

Sing Sing's enormous complex includes, along with the ruins of the 1826 cellblock, prefabricated Family Reunion Program trailers and a Quality of Working Life conference building constructed in the nineteen-eighties. The architectural hodgepodge is a sort of palimpsest of conflicting philosophies of how to deal with the criminal class. Americans began experimenting with incarceration as a humane alternative to corporal punishment in the late seventeenth century. The leaders of the movement to rethink the prison were Pennsylvania Quakers. Their goals were preventing further harm to society, deterrence, and, by the early nineteenth century, "penitent reflection" intended to lead to personal reformation. This was the beginning of an American innovation, the penitentiary. Philadelphia's Walnut Street jail and later, in 1829, the massive Eastern State Peni-



"Don't cry, Mom. Lots of parents have children who didn't get into their first-choice college, and they went on to live happy, fulfilled lives."

"Like many large people, Benson moves with remarkable grace."

tentiary were designed as places for prisoners to spend the day entirely alone, with only daytime work projects in their cells, and a Bible, for company. The arrangement came to be known as the "separate system," and it attracted much attention, both abroad and at home.

The first warden of Sing Sing was a cruel but innovative disciplinarian named Elam Lynds. A former Army captain, Lynds had been the warden (or "agent," in the usage of the time) at the state prison at Auburn, where he had experimented with an extreme version of the separate system: he subtracted work and daily recreation from the Pennsylvania arrangement. Of the eighty-three inmates subjected to this treatment, several went mad or committed suicide; most of the others were pardoned when the experiment was abandoned. Lynds modified his plan to allow inmates to labor together, silently, in prison shops during the day. Since this "congregate system," as it came to be known, appeared to be a success, with the labor producing more money for the public coffers than Pennsylvania's, Lynds was asked to oversee the construction and development of a new prison. A handpicked crew of inmates and "keepers" travelled with him from Auburn via the Erie Canal and then by freight steamer down the Hudson to the village of Sing Sing, where they began quarrying stone for what was to be named, ironically, Mt. Pleasant State Prison.

Mt. Pleasant was the first stop made by Alexis de Tocqueville and his friend Gustave de Beaumont when they came to America in 1831. The sight of nine hundred convicts hard at work, unrestrained by walls or chains, impressed them. Lynds's achievement was one that I think would dazzle most correction officers and wardens today. The building of Sing Sing offered a spectacle of total control. And yet, by the time Tocqueville and Beaumont wrote their final report, they had their doubts:

> One cannot see the prison of Sing-Sing and the system of labour which is there established without being struck by astonishment and fear. Although the discipline is perfect, one feels that it rests on fragile foundations: it is due to a tour de force which is reborn unceasingly and which has to be reproduced each day, under penalty of compromising the whole system of discipline. The safety of the keepers is constantly menaced. In the presence of such dangers, avoided with such skill but with difficulty, it seems to us impossible not to fear some sort of catastrophe in the future.

In the early years at Sing Sing, Lynds was given more or less carte blanche to punish as he saw fit. Whippings were administered, once the cellblock was occupied, in an area of the ground floor called the Flogging Post. Two iron rings had been fastened to the wall with staples; hanging nearby were a number of cat-o'-nine-tails and, according to one inmate account, sometimes a gag. Inmates were stripped, their hands were tied to the rings, and the keepers they had offended administered blows to their backs. This sort of thing disturbed the members of a legislative committee that was convened to examine the system's harsher aspects, and Lynds was fired as warden in 1844. Four years later, use of the cat-o'-nine-tails was abolished, although the prison continued to operate much as it had before. Corporal punishment in general was not renounced.

"Prisoners are treated now like wild animals and are kept in cages," Thomas Mott Osborne, a Harvard-educated politician from Auburn, declared in a lecture in 1905. "The system brutalizes the men and the keepers." Hoping to revive the idea of prison as a place where prisoners could be rehabilitated, Osborne got himself named chairman of a new state commission on prison reform, succeeded in having an ally appointed warden of Auburn, and then had a brainstorm: he entered the prison for a week as an "inmate" himself, and used the experience and publicity to further his campaign for reform.

Osborne, who became warden of Sing Sing late in 1914, was one of the great modern penal reformers. The centerpiece of his program was the idea that inmates had to be given responsibility if they were to be properly prepared for life as free citizens. He instituted the Mutual Welfare League, a system of inmate self-government, but this provoked charges of "coddling." Plots were hatched to discredit him; he was accused of, among other things, having committed sodomy with a prisoner. The charges were dropped, but Osborne resigned less than two years after he became warden.

Osborne's ideas lived on to some degree through his famous successor, Lewis Lawes, a former guard from Elmira. Though Lawes believed that prison administration was by its very nature despotic, he favored an enlightened despotism. He also believed that crime begins in the slums and that prison itself can't cure it. He opposed the death penalty that he had to administer. And, like Osborne, Lawes believed in increasing public awareness of prison conditions. The great crime wave of the nineteen-twenties and -thirties, the gangster era, had brought prisons to the attention of Hollywood, and Lawes allowed Warner Bros. inside Sing Sing to film "Angels with Dirty Faces" (1938), starring James Cagney and Humphrey Bogart; "Each Dawn I Die" (1939), with Cagney and George Raft; "Castle on the Hudson" (1940), with John Garfield and Ann Sheridan, and other movies, including two based on books by Lawes, "Twenty Thousand Years in Sing Sing" and "Invisible Stripes." A recurrent figure in the films and in Lawes's books is a firm but compassionate warden.

The job of warden at Sing Sing was a political appointment until the nineteen-fifties, when it became a civil-service post. The fifties and sixties brought the "professionalization" of corrections—the idea that prison was something a working person might make a "career" of. This meant better pay and training and a higher standard of on-the-job conduct for guards, but the advent of bureaucratic administration seemed to guarantee that the visionary policies of Thomas Mott Osborne and the humane paternalism of Lewis Lawes were things of the past.

With the mothballing of the electric chair in 1963, Sing Sing became more and more of a corrections backwater. There were no funds forthcoming for the modern industrial-education shops that other maximum-security prisons enjoyed, no room for a prison farm, such as the one inmates ran at Green Haven. Officer turnover increased, and discipline suffered. In 1982, four guards and a sergeant were indicted on corruption charges, including being paid to smuggle marijuana and cocaine into the prison. The following year, prisoners took over B-block and held seventeen guards hostage for two days. According to a state report on the incident, Sing Sing was by then "to most of the outside world . . . a relic from musty books and old movies, which many people were surprised to learn was still in use after 157 years." In 1988, page 1 of the New York *Daily News* carried a mortifying headline: "SING SING SEXCAPADES." The story that followed referred to "a clique of rogue correction officers" and "trysts between male inmates and female guards." It reported that random urine tests had shown that twenty-one per cent of the inmates in Sing Sing were on drugs, compared with a statewide prison average of six per cent.

Correction officers don't like being referred to as "prison guards," with all the negative connotations that the phrase has come to have, but that is what most newspapers—and everyone else—call them. Before I went to the training academy, I spoke with a steward of the correction officers' union, Rick Kingsley, who works at the Washington Correctional Facility, a medium-security prison in Comstock, New York. He'd been a dairy farmer for years, he said, before switching to corrections. His brother, who had been a car salesman, had become a C.O., too. Kingsley was divorced, with a son he was putting through college, because, as he put it, "officer after officer will tell you: there's no way in hell you'd want your kid to be a C.O." He said that probably ninety per cent of the officers he knew would tell a stranger they met on vacation that they worked at something else—carpentry, he liked to say for himself—because the job carried such a stigma. Sure, it had its advantages, like the salary, the benefits, the job security, and, with seniority, the schedule: starting work at dawn, he had afternoons free to work on his land and rebuild his log cabin. (The previous one had burned down.) But mainly, he said, prison work was about waiting. The inmates waited for their sentences to run out, and the officers waited for retirement. It was "a life sentence in eight-hour shifts."

Being a guard has never been a great job, but in more hopeful times there was more to recommend it. For a while, the system seemed to encourage the idea that correction officers had a role to play in correction. Guards, for example, used to teach inmate classes. One day, a deputy superintendent gave me permission to look through two manila folders he kept of old newspaper clippings and prison memorabilia. In one of them I saw a "Help Wanted" poster published by the state in the fifties to attract applicants for jobs as guards. It listed the usual supervision and custodial work among a guard's duties, but there was also a line about helping to counsel and reform the prisoner. Nothing like that was ever suggested to me when I was being trained. I think the department is smart enough to know that today's C.O.s would only laugh.

At the academy, an officer's duties are defined as "care, custody, and control." Rehabilitation is somebody else's business. Or, more correctly, nobody's. Federal grants to inmates for post-secondary education were banned in 1995, and other programs at Sing Sing have been pared so drastically that "there isn't much left to cut," a prison administrator said. In practical terms, this leaves inmates with nothing much to do all day, and guards with no mission except to enforce the rules, which increasingly politicized prisoners reject as arbitrary creations of their oppressors. Many African-American inmates, for instance, from the crummiest drug dealer on up, think of themselves as prisoners of war. This undercuts an officer's authority, and, when it is combined with a compromised ability to use force as an instrument of fear, causes incertitude.

I was intrigued by a Latino officer I'd seen in the lineup room. Like the rest of us, he kept his little yellow "Standards of Inmate Behavior" booklet in his breast pocket, but, unlike us, he had written "Fuck No" in block letters along the top edge of it—the part of the booklet that peeked out of his pocket. It was his personal message to inmates, and, actually, a pretty good summary of the booklet itself. It made me think he was probably a good officer, funny but tough, an enforcer of the rules. Then a friend of mine spent a week working with that officer and told me how every morning an inmate would fix him his coffee, passing the mug out through the bars of his cell. There was no rule against it, but what favors was the officer passing back in the inmate's direction? How could you ever trust an inmate enough to drink his coffee?

The fuzziness about rules was a strange counterpoint to the solidness of Sing Sing's walls, the seeming immutability of the prison. I thought about this as I walked through the tunnels and corridors. Eyes on the floor, I'd watch the yellow traffic lines painted down the middle of most hallways to keep opposing traffic on its proper side. There were broad perpendicular lines at gates, where inmates were supposed to stop and wait for permission to proceed. Of course, they hardly ever did.

Often I wouldn't know if I was to be an escort or a gallery officer until I made it to B-block and told Hattie (Mama) Cradle my job number. She was the O.I.C., or officer in charge—a fifty-something woman five feet tall and just about as big around whose horn-rimmed reading spectacles hung on a chain from her thick neck. She would check her clipboard and tell us where we were posted. "Conover, 254," I would say, and she would check the spelling on the tag on my shirt and say something like "R and W," meaning that I was assigned to galleries R and W, which were parallel to one another on the second floor.

Gallery officers are like cops on a beat, the guys on the front lines. The gallery officer on R and W is responsible for overseeing around a hundred and fifteen inmates. Sometimes an escort officer is there to help you, sometimes not. At its worst moments—say, if the inmates from both galleries were sent back from the mess hall at the same time—it would be just them (violent criminals all, about a third with murder convictions) and me.

Inmates are out of their cells for much of the day. Prisons are already insanely expensive to run, and if a guard were required to escort every inmate individually from his cell to a classroom or the gym or the yard, they would cost many, many times as much. So inmates are moved en masse, all day long. They go to meals in the mess hall. They go in large escorted groups to the school or the hospital buildings. They go without any escort at all to the yard and the gym. But before they can make these trips they have to be released from their cells, and when they return they have to be cajoled back in. Controlling inmates during these moments of minor liberty, and returning them to their cells when the liberty is over, is the main job of the gallery officer.

Inmates love to test new officers, partly to measure their own strength. C.O.s want compliance, and inmates want to defy. The balance of power is reset every day. And then there is the entertainment value of officers. "To an inmate in his cell, you're like TV," one of my instructors at the academy had remarked. On my first days on a gallery, porters (trusties—inmates assigned to sweep and mop) would try to convince me that they were allowed to be out of their cells when they weren't supposed to be, or that they were entitled to receive a shower. I would find prisoners who belonged on other floors talking to inmates on mine, and they would tell me that *their* gallery officer had given them permission to be on *my* floor, which was extremely unlikely, and in any event irrelevant. Inmates would heckle me ("You gay, right, C.O.? That's why you lookin' in on a man while he's getting dressed?") and call me names ("Hey, Barney! Barney Fife! Hey, Don Knotts!").

It would have been easy to be physically intimidated by the inmates, but early on I realized you just had to put the possibility of violence out of your mind. If they were going to hit you, they were going to hit you. "Hey, C.O.!" an inmate called to me from behind, on my first day on R and W. When I turned to face

"I'm not a miracle worker. I can't do the surgery for less than four thousand."

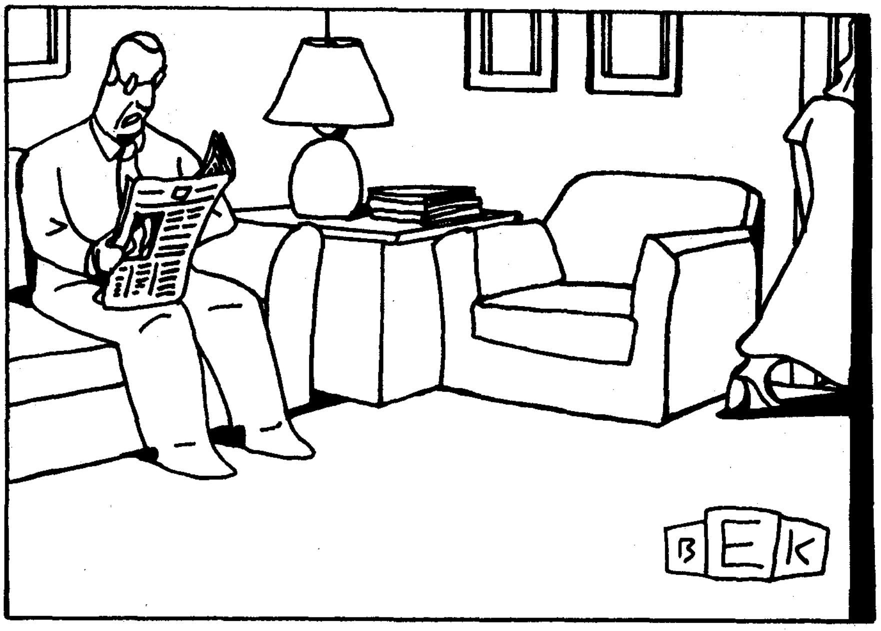
him, a short, bulky man at his side went through nine-tenths of the motion of landing an uppercut on my chin. He stopped maybe an inch away. I jumped backward, and the two of them laughed uproariously and strolled off down the gallery to the gym.

The encounter left me dumbfounded, with my pulse racing. What should I have done? Pulled out my baton and whacked him? Punched him? That would be an easier call for a larger C.O.; I wasn't too eager to start a fight that, at a hundred and fifty pounds, I was likely to lose.

The alternative, in a situation like this, is to write an Inmate Misbehavior Report, or "ticket." In this case, I thought the infraction would be 102.10, "Threats to an Officer." An inmate receiving a ticket was "keeplocked," or confined to his cell twenty-three hours a day, pending disposition of the charges by the prison's disciplinary committee; if the ticket was upheld, he could be further confined, anywhere from a few days to several months, or even be sent to disciplinary segregation—solitary confinement—in the Special Housing Unit, or SHU, pronounced "shoe" but referred to simply as "the Box."

But you didn't want to write a wimpy ticket. I hadn't been hurt, and officers were idly threatened all day long. If you wrote a lot of tickets for piddly shit, it was like crying wolf to the members of the disciplinary committee, who were inundated with tickets, and they wouldn't be there for you when you really needed them. So I didn't do anything.

As recently as twenty years ago, old-time officers told me, it would be exceptional to find more than ten B-block inmates on keeplock at any one time, out of the six hundred and thirty-five in the block. Nowadays the number is nearer a hundred, and the Box is always full—of the very worst keeplocks, generally those who have actually attacked officers. Since keeplocks are always on the gallery, they are the inmates an officer comes to know best. When all the other inmates have gone to the gym or the library or the yard, you talk to the keeplocks. You also get to know them because they require the most attention: three times a week, they must be individually escorted to and from a shower cell. And their cells must be unlocked every day for their one hour of yard recreation with the other keeplocks, and then locked again when they return.



"Don't walk away from me while I'm not paying any attention to you."

One day, I was taken off a comfortable escort post on A-block and reassigned to L and P galleries, on the top floor. That in itself was discouraging, since I'd been anticipating a fairly calm day, but then I discovered how many keeplocks the two galleries had: nearly thirty between them. On the north half of P gallery, the number was particularly high, about one for every four cells. Several of the keeplocks were in consecutive cells, which concentrated the bad vibe.

My problems began when the keeplocks returned from keeplock rec, about two hours into the shift. When the O.I.C. announced their return over the P.A. system, my first job was to clear the galleries of other inmates, to minimize the chance of trouble. The only inmates who were out on the galleries were three or four porters. Two of them were slow to return to their cells, and when I saw the keeplocks arriving I ordered the two laggards into a shower stall on P-north, next to my office.

"Come on, C.O. That's bullshit!" one protested loudly.

"Yeah, C.O., the regular never makes us do that," said the other one. I got them in anyway, but the complaining caught on with the two or three keeplocks whose cells were on the other side of the shower.

"Let 'em stay out, C.O.!"

"You too harsh, man!"

"You want to start a slave revolt, C.O.? That's what you doing?"

It was too early in the day for this, I said to myself. I walked over to the loudest keeplock, P-49, a scary-looking guy with dreadlocks, dirty clothes, and one gray and clouded eye.

"What I'm doing is absolutely appropriate, and you know it," I said, trying to keep my voice low but unable to preserve my sang-froid. "Do me a favor—shut up and let me do my job."

"*Whoo*, 'Shut up!' C.O. told me to shut up!" he crowed, completely jazzed, as I walked away. Others took up the hue and cry. "C.O. told him to shut up!" I walked back toward the center gate to start putting the returning keeplocks into their cells. And not a minute too soon. The keeplock officers, always eager to avoid extra work, were beating a hasty retreat down the center stairs.

"Hey!" I yelled after them, as they waited for the officer downstairs to open the center gate. "How about sticking around a couple of minutes to help me get these guys back in? I've got thirty of them out and don't know where a single one locks. You going to leave me with that?" Grudgingly, they returned.

At 11 A.M., when it was time for the count, an officer newer than I was appeared on the gallery. Her name was Reid, and she was a tall redhead I had worked with one day when she was in training. (To keep inmates from learning our first names, nametags bore only the initial. Officers got in the habit of using last names to refer to one another, and didn't even know another person's first name unless he was a friend.) The O.I.C. had sent her to do the go-round; that is, make a list of where all the inmates planned to be after lunch, so that they could be tracked down in case they had a visit, had forgotten a medical appointment, etc. Go-round forms were filled out at the same time as the count forms. You stopped at each cell on a gallery and said, for example, "L-3, where you going this afternoon?"

Something like one out of every ten officers is female. Most of them are assigned to posts where they won't be the only officer facing a crowd of inmates, but when they have a job that requires them to enter the area where men live, they yell, "Female on the gallery!" at the top of their lungs. That usually results in a dozen mirrors being stuck out of cells so that inmates can get a good look. Sometimes there are catcalls, and that day they were especially obnoxious on P-north.

"Hey, Red! Show me that red pussy!" yelled one inmate. "You ain't gettin' enough, are you, Red?" called another. "I'm gonna give it you!" I was feeling uneasy as Officer Reid marched bravely down the gallery. She wasn't the tough sort, just a farm girl who needed a job. And she was good-looking. Inmates sometimes tried to ejaculate on female officers; this had already happened to two of my academy classmates. I kept an eye on Reid until my phone rang.

Two minutes later, she was in my office, looking flustered.

"You got a misbehavior form?" she asked.

"What happened?"

"Masturbator," she said.

"What cell?"

SHOWCASE BY MAX VADUKUL

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

"In our society, if you do something that's funny it means you're not serious. You can be either serious or funny," Mark Morris says. "It's like, when was that rule established? I was out of town." Fortunately, the choreographer's back in town, for six performances of "Platée," his latest full-length opera-ballet, in April at Lincoln Center. It's based on the eighteenth-century *comédie lyrique* by Rameau, about the amorous delusions of a swamp frog who believes that Jupiter, the king of the gods, is in love with her.

The Baroque original premièred at Versailles, at the wedding celebration of the Dauphin and María Teresa, a Spanish princess, who was not, apparently, easy on the eyes. "I hope she was stupid as well as ugly, so her feelings weren't hurt too much," Morris (at right, in black) says, with an evil laugh. "But it was 1745! It was still incredibly funny to throw a drumstick and hit a dwarf in the head."

Morris's version is filled with fabulous bestial capering performed in equally fabulous Mizrahi costumes: tortoises copulate in an onstage pond and a pair of snakes entwine their thirty-foot-long tails. There's a newt, a duck, a lizard, a cockatiel—step for step, Morris's choreography matches Rameau's orchestral color.

But, for all the animal japery, Platée herself—with her lorgnette, her pearl necklace, and her long, green, tree-toad fingers—is heartbreaking. "Either the message is 'Don't ever consider marrying above your station' or it's the 'Wizard of Oz' version: 'Everything I wanted was already here,'" Morris says. "She goes back to the swamp, where all of her friends are. It's not necessarily horrible."

—*Kevin Conley*

She told me, and I checked my list of inmates.

"Too bad. He's a keeplock already. Anything else?" Reid shook her head. I rang the sergeant and he said to send her to his office. Then I walked down P-north.

"What's your fucking problem?" I said to the inmate who had exposed himself. He was lying on his bunk, his pants zipped up, smiling, looking smug. He wouldn't answer. Upstate, I had heard, this kind of thing didn't happen too often. Upstate, an inmate who spoke a wrong word to a female officer quickly regretted it.

* * *

"C.O., you call a sergeant for me yet?" This was the voice of P-49, the keeplock who, earlier in the morning, I had told to shut up. He'd been badgering me since then to get a sergeant upstairs to speak with him: not about me—about someone else. I'd called the sergeant, who said he knew what P-49 wanted, and that he'd get back to him. I'd already told P-49 this. I repeated it to him again impatiently, adding that there was nothing more I could do for him.

"Oh, yes, there is, C.O. You can suck my dick!" P-49 said loudly. There were hoots of approval from the other keeplocks as I walked away.

P-49 continued to hector me the rest of the day. Unfortunately, his cell was close to my office. "C.O., get away from my cell!" he'd yell when I walked by. "Homer, get back to the sticks." (The assumption was that, since I am white, I was from upstate.) His neighbor keeplocks would cheer in support; they were his chorus.

"He looks like a puppet, don't he?" P-49 taunted as I tried to keep my temper in check. I knew I had a loose-jointed style of running, but had never heard it suggested about my walk before. "Go home, Forrest Gump."

I'd noticed that P-49 was holding his mirror out on the gallery to keep track of my approaches, and also that, against the rules, he sometimes left it balanced up on his bars. I tried to grab the mirror, but he anticipated the move and snatched it away. Half an hour later, I noticed it was up again. Quietly this time, I walked up and took it. He was furious. "You better watch out when you come back by, C.O.," he threatened, adding something that I couldn't understand but that I presumed to be about shitting me down. (Hurling feces at an officer is an angry keeplock's trump card.)

In my eagerness to get the mirror, I'd placed myself on the wrong side of his cell. To get back to my office, I'd have to pass by again. I probably should have sprinted past the cell, but I didn't want to show any fear. As I drew even with P-49, it all happened very fast: a gob of spit flew past my nose, with my cheek catching some spray, and then the keeplock's arm swung out at full length. His fist caught my head just behind the ear. I stumbled forward.

My heart was beating fast. I spent a minute calming down and then called the sergeant's office again.

"Who was it?"

"P-49. Folk."

"Bring down your misbehavior report," he said curtly.

I turned over the mirror. On the back, in graffiti-style script, Folk had written "The Universal Don" and "Da Silva-Back Guerrilla" and "The Assassin." The sergeant sent an officer to relieve me. She seemed sympathetic, and said things like "Too bad we can't go in there and show that asshole what the fuck is what," and I felt a little better.

When I arrived in his office, the sergeant wrote out a new ticket for me in red pen. The nice thing about his version was that it sounded worse than it was: "assault," "unhygienic act," "threats," etc. I did feel an element of shame in being a victim, and pointed out to every officer who passed by that this was the first time it had happened to me. The sergeant asked why I was walking close enough to the cell for the inmate to reach me. I answered that I didn't want to appear afraid, which he accepted, though he told me an officer should always walk as far as possible from the cells. "It might give you more time to grab his arm and break it," he said, never cracking a smile.

It wasn't really a joke to me, either. That very thought had already crossed my mind.

There was more paperwork. Despite the fact that Folk had merely grazed me with his fist, I had to be checked over in the emergency room. A nurse there let me wash up with antibacterial soap. She was vociferous in her scorn for my assailant, and I had warm feelings about her, at least until she whispered, "I'll bet he was black, right?" The sergeant took front and profile Polaroid shots of me, which was required, I think, in case I made a claim for workmen's comp. I looked at the photos as we walked to the watch commander's office. They made me seem gaunt and nerdy.

The sergeant had already been in touch with the Box and reserved a cell for my assailant. He evidently had clout, since there wasn't often room there. I felt a touch of gratitude. He spoke to a team of officers who were doing some overtime arranging for Folk's relocation to the Box. "He might not go willingly," he said, which was greeted with nods of satisfaction. I would have enjoyed watching the "relocation," but they would never have let me. And, to be honest, all I really wanted to do was leave.

As I was passing through the front gate of the prison, a sergeant whom I liked—Murray—called out. "Hey, Conover," he said, and made a hawking sound. I smiled weakly.

"So you already heard, huh?"

"Heard about it in about a minute," Murray said. I wondered if the incident would make the announcements at lineup.

I had a pounding headache—it had been growing all afternoon—and, as I got onto the highway, I experienced a vivid fantasy of A-block going up in flames, all the dross inside it being consumed by the fire. And then came dissonant flashes of memory from that same day—the inmate who had tried to tell me a joke as I set up the locking board outside his cell, the inmate who had warned me about an unfriendly sergeant who was approaching, the inmate whose classical guitar playing, particularly gorgeous in that setting, had drifted into my office around lunchtime. They weren't all bad, I thought. Just most of them.

* * *

Unlike most of my fellow-officers, I think it's fair to say, I had entered the academy with a liberal frame of mind. I was conscious of the harsh circumstances that had no doubt played a role in many of the inmates' becoming criminals, and was pretty sympathetic to them. But practically every day that I worked at Sing Sing eroded that sympathy. Inmates took kindness for weakness, and tried to exploit it. I would speak to an inmate respectfully, and he would be profane and insulting in return. Simple directions to insure conformity with established routines—"Please step into your cell now, it's time for the count"—would occasion wild outbursts of scorn and refusal.

My experience was not unique. For instance, an officer I admired named Hillary, a genial, Caribbean-born Brooklyn resident who worked on U and Z galleries, took special care to run it well. The place was always spotless. His porters weren't allowed out for long, and they did a lot of work. He had his office painted a light blue; his desk and paperwork were always in perfect order. He had requested his posting and seemed to have good relations with most of the galleries' residents. But one day I was escorting an inmate to the emergency room and found Hillary there, being cleaned off by a nurse and interviewed by Sergeant Murray. His face bore an expression of—what to call it?—humiliation, spiritual pain.

"Hillary, what's up?" I asked him. "What's wrong?"

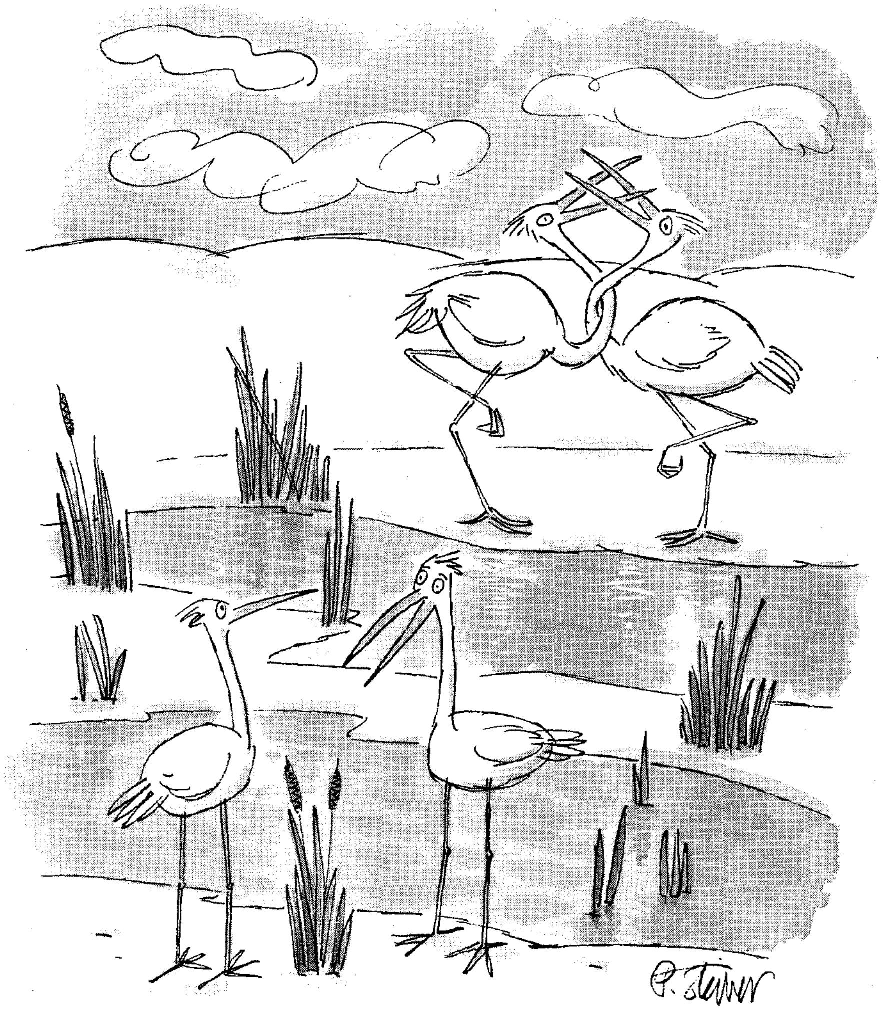
"I got shitted down," he said morosely.

"You?" The officers I knew whom this had happened to were people who had little rapport with inmates. Hillary was not like that. The keeplock who had attacked him, a young man with a consuming anger, was mentally ill. I knew the guy—I'd filled in for Hillary a few times. But I was shocked. Hillary's office, too, had been splattered with shit—his beautiful office. Hillary didn't deserve this. I felt sick about it.

But that was the kind of thing inmates did—not all of them, of course, but enough that, over time, you started thinking the worst of all of them. And the more you saw of it—even if you knew that at some level the system was responsible—the less you liked inmates, and the more inclined you were not to be bothered when other officers called them "crooks" or "mutts." Despite the old saw that the only difference between officers and prisoners was the color of the uniform, there was a difference. One of the groups tended to obey the law and the other to disrespect it; one of the groups tended to heap scorn on the other, who more often than not took it on the chin.

That's why, I have to admit, I felt a little thrill the day Sergeant Holmes told me at lineup that I had a special assignment. I would be part of a frisk team sent to the Box, which had been uncontrollable lately. An inmate had got out of his cell and had broken fifty-eight windows (because the building is old, many of the panes are small). A day or two later, an officer and a sergeant had had urine thrown on them. The morning's assignment was a complete search of the Box for contraband, particularly shards of glass. This would be done one cell at a time, one inmate at a time. It was the second strip search since the initial incident, and some inmates were expected to resist. A dozen or so of us were issued handcuffs and flashlights, and loaded up with tall piles of search/contraband and misbehavior forms, as well as three big bags of "cell extraction" equipment, and we marched purposefully downstairs to the Box. Despite the ominous tone, and my better instincts, I'd countenanced enough inmate misbehavior and disrespect to feel invigorated by the thought that this is where it all stops. This is where we draw the line. We were going to follow the rules, and we were going to have our way.

The Box is a dark, squat building, a place of punishment within a place of punishment. David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam killer, was in the Box at Sullivan for nine years. Elmira's Box held Lemuel Smith, who in 1981 had tricked a young correction officer, Donna Payant, into meeting him in a chaplain's empty office at Green Haven, where he raped and strangled her (and, according to one of the instructors at the academy, chewed off her nipples). She was the last



"Of course mating is natural. It's just not the kind of thing you want to see your parents doing."

"He's like this perfect combination of Oscar de la Renta and Oscar de la Hoya."

• •

C.O. murdered on the job in New York State.

Half of the inmate inhabitants of the Box—those on the upper floor—are not disciplinary cases but men under protective custody. There are two kinds. Those who have asked to be protected are rats or rape and slicing victims who have identified their assailants—people who have enemies and, if left in the general population, could reasonably be expected to get hurt or killed. Among those there involuntarily are victims who have not ratted on their assailants, and thus are feared to be either loaded guns, waiting for their chance to get revenge, or sitting ducks, soon to be victimized again. Downstairs are the baddest of the bad. Downstairs feels like a dungeon, in part because entry to the building is via the second floor, but also because it's darker down there, with smaller windows and lower ceilings.

The Box has the highest testosterone level in the prison, and smells like it—close, musty, with an acrid whiff of perspiration. The officers who choose to work in the Box tend to be Size Large. They tuck their trousers into the tops of unlaced boots and roll short sleeves up over their muscles—the casual SWAT-team look. The first day I worked downstairs during my on-the-job-training period, I watched a shaved-headed monster named Perlstein (not his real name) help a fellow-officer change his shirt. The man was so muscle-bound he couldn't reach back far enough to get his second hand into the sleeve hole.

The environment of the Box produces stunning acts of insanity and barbarism. During our on-the-job training, we were told of a Box inmate nicknamed Mr. Slurpee who would project a spray of urine and feces at officers—out of his mouth. One day at lineup, a sergeant held up for display an interesting-looking noose about three feet long. "We think we take everything away that they could hurt themselves with," he said. "And then we find this—made out of toilet paper." He left it out for display. An inmate had rolled endless yards of toilet paper into tight cords before weaving the cords together into the noose. It was dingy-white from all the handling and, to judge by my tugging, seemed as tough as a real rope. Impressive, I thought, but, on another level, all this resourcefulness for a noose?

By the time we'd descended the stairs to the first floor of the Box, the inmates had become very quiet. They could hear us, no doubt, but not yet see us. One of the officers, Konoval, who was the first to walk into their view, set up a video camera on a tripod to record the proceedings. I had noticed that the department often did this when a use of force was anticipated, probably to protect itself from lawsuits. We all put on latex gloves, and then, en masse, poured onto the gallery.

I was partners with my friend Feliciano, a Bronx-born ex-marine who was even fresher out of the academy than I was, and there were three other pairs like us. Each team had been assigned a cell. I did the talking to our inmate, a Latino in his twenties. "Good morning. We're going to strip-frisk you, then you're going to come out and we're going to frisk your cell." The man had been through this drill two or three days before, and assented. He didn't look angry or demented, just sort of discombobulated. He handed us his shirt, his pants, his socks, his underwear, and then turned and bent over and spread his cheeks.

"Fine," I said, as he dressed. "Now turn around and we'll cuff you." The inmate put his hands behind him and thrust them through a hole in the door, and Feliciano cuffed him. "Open 105!" I called out to the officer in the bubble (a control cage from which an officer operates the gates and cell doors by means of an ancient system of brass-handled levers that stick out from the wall; the officer can't leave the bubble without a relief officer coming in). The cell door opened and the inmate stepped out backward, wearing socks but no shoes. Feliciano held his handcuff chain and walked the man toward the opposite wall, under the windows. He told him not to turn around, and then drew his baton and held it in ready position across his torso, what is called "port arms" position.

I frisked the cell, which was a pigsty, with roaches crawling over bunched-up sheets and garbage on the floor. I flipped through his notebooks; the handwriting was lovely. He had made a chess set that used toothpaste caps and squares of paper as pieces. (I had seen these games in action. Another inmate had to have a board, too, and they had to make voice moves, since neither could see the other's board.) There was a lot of pencil-written gang graffiti on the walls, but no contraband.

The frisk of our second cell, which belonged to a skinny, middle-aged man, was also uneventful. Feliciano turned up only an extra state-issued pillow, which we confiscated. Before the search was over, however, we were distracted by a commotion at the entrance to the gallery. The Box officers, Perlstein and two others, had put on full cell-extraction ("hats and bats") gear—helmets with clear face shields, stab-proof vests, knee and elbow pads, and heavy gloves. They were preparing to go in after an inmate I'll call Duncan, who had refused to coöperate. I recognized Duncan from B-block—a short black man with dreds who apparently was a perpetrator in a recent fracas in the B-block yard in which officers had been injured. Cameras had shown him throwing things at officers and egging the others on. He seemed to hate C.O.s. The extraction officers stood one in front of the other, the second and third holding on to the officer in front of them, and the lead officer carrying a clear riot shield. On a signal, they started moving forward in step, like a locomotive gaining speed. "Open 101!" someone shouted. Another officer pulled open the cell door and they went in on each other's heels, the shield being used to smoosh Duncan into the back corner of the cell. It was hopeless for him, I knew—like going into battle with a rhino. Three minutes and many thuds later, they emerged with the inmate in handcuffs and leg restraints. He somehow managed to raise a fist in defiance as they carried him upstairs to do a forcible strip search.

That was when things started getting raucous. Inmates up and down the gallery began to yell. We were "bitch-ass faggot motherfuckers." We were getting off on looking at them. They would file lawsuits, because we were not following Directive 4910. (It says that sergeants have to be in constant supervision of a strip frisk.) One inmate began pleading endlessly to see one of the sergeants, and when she refused to talk to him he started berating her and Sing Sing's two black captains as "house niggers."

"Kill all house niggers, kill all house niggers!" he chanted, for more than fifteen minutes.

Somehow, this felt like the first wave of an attack. Feliciano and I were given a third cell, that of a young, thin black man, Lincoln George. I repeated the line about the strip frisk, and asked him to hand us his clothes.

"I'm not going to show you my asshole," he stated without affect, starting to remove his shirt.

"You've got to," I said.

He stopped taking the shirt off.

"I won't do it," he repeated.

I tried to reason with him in a low voice. "Look, man, you see what they're doing. They'll do it to you. It's not worth it. We'll be done in like five seconds. Let's just get it done."

He shook his head, and said, "According to Directive 4910, you could use a hand scanner instead of doing a body-cavity search."

"This is not a body-cavity search," I said. "Nobody's going inside. We're just looking outside."

He shook his head. Why on earth, I wondered, would anyone choose cell extraction?

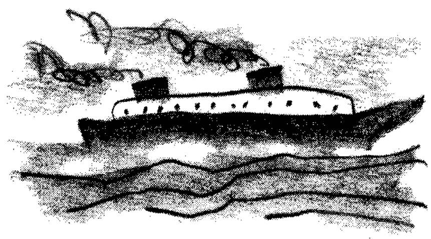
"So you're refusing?" Feliciano said.

"I want to speak to a sergeant."

This was every inmate's right. I summoned the male sergeant, who, given the din and the insults, was in no mood for negotiation. "I'm giving you a direct order to comply with the frisk," he said. I couldn't hear the inmate's reply.

"So you're refusing to comply?" the sergeant said. Lincoln George nodded. The sergeant left the gallery and spoke with the extraction team.

They were swift and tough. George made little attempt to brace himself or otherwise prepare for their entrance, so it didn't take long. He was basically knocked down and flattened, then hauled upstairs to be forcibly searched. We frisked his cell and found nothing.



Meanwhile, the extraction team had brought Duncan back down. They placed him in his cell, unchained him, and were on their way out when he snatched the leg chain out of one officer's hand and swung it at him, hitting him hard on the visor. The surprised team completed their exit from the cell and closed the door. Then they turned around, regrouped, and went back in again to get the leg chain. Duncan appeared shortly afterward at the door to his cell, a big scrape on one cheek and no doubt untold other wounds less easy to see. He looked thrilled.

The extractors took a break and then bulldozed their way into a third cell. This one I couldn't see, but it took longer than the others, and the officers were shouting, "Stop resisting! Stop resisting!" partway through. The phrase was used to protect yourself legally when you were, for whatever reason, applying a bit of extra force. Konoval was following with the camera, but as the officers knew, all he could see was their backs. The inmate continued to struggle as he was carried up the stairs. I picked up half a shattered face shield after they went by.

And then it was all done but the paperwork. The cell-extraction team came back downstairs, removed their armor, and gave each other hearty hugs and slaps on the back. They were sweaty and charged up like victorious football players. I felt the catharsis, too, a thrilling release, with our team coming out on top.

But, as the moment faded and I picked up my gear to go, I paused and looked back down the gallery. It was quiet now. No weapon had been found in any cell. Perhaps none had actually been expected: it seemed reasonable to conclude that we had been sent to make a statement about who was in charge. And I had to wonder: With the outcome never in doubt, what had we won? What especially puzzled me was the refusal of Lincoln George to submit to a strip frisk. What could account for an action so apparently contrary to his best interests? But then I realized that self-respect had required him to refuse. He was not stupid. He was simply renouncing his imprisonment, our authority, the entire system that had placed him there. ♦

FICTION

PASTORALIA

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

I have to admit I'm not feeling my best. Not that I'm doing so bad. Not that I really have anything to complain about. Not that I would actually verbally complain if I did have something to complain about. No. Because I'm Thinking Positive/Saying Positive. I'm sitting back on my haunches, waiting for people to poke in their heads. Although it's been thirteen days since anyone poked in their head and Janet's speaking English to me more and more, which is partly why I feel so crummy.

"Jeez," she says first thing this morning. "I'm so tired of roast goat I could scream."

What am I supposed to say to that? It puts me in a bad spot. She thinks I'm a goody-goody and that her speaking English makes me uncomfortable. And she's right. It does. Because we've got it good. Every morning, a new goat, just killed, sits in our Big Slot. In our Little Slot, a book of matches. That's better than some. Some are required to catch wild hares in snares, or to wear pioneer garb while cutting the heads off chickens. But not us. I just have to haul the dead goat out of the Big Slot and skin it with a sharp flint. Janet just has to make the fire. So things are pretty good. Not as good as in the old days, but, then again, not so bad.

In the old days, when heads were constantly poking in, we liked what we did. Really hammed it up. Had little grunting fights. Whenever I was about to toss a handful of dirt in her face I'd pound a rock against a rock in rage. That way she knew to close her eyes. Sometimes she did this kind of crude weaving. It was like: Roots of Weaving. Sometimes we'd go down to the Russian Peasant Farm for a barbecue, I remember there was Murray and Leon, Leon was dating Eileen, Eileen was the one with all the cats, but now, with the big decline in heads poking in, the Russian Peasants are all fired, Eileen's cats have gone wild, and, honest to God, sometimes I worry I'll go to the Big Slot and find it goatless.

This morning I go to the Big Slot and find it goatless. Instead of a goat there's a note: *Hold on, hold on*, it says. *The goat's coming, for crissake. Don't get all snooty.*

The problem is, what am I going to do during the hour when I'm supposed to be skinning the goat with the flint? I decide to pretend to be desperately ill. I rock in a corner and moan. This gets old.

Janet comes in from her Separate Area and her eyebrows go up.

"No freaking goat?" she says.

I make some guttural sounds and some motions meaning: Big rain come down, and boom, make goats run, goats now away, away in high hills, and, as my fear was great, I did not follow.

Janet scratches under her armpit and makes a sound like a monkey, then lights a cigarette. "What a bunch of shit," she says. "Why you insist, I'll never know. Who's here? Do you see anyone here but us?"

I gesture to her to put out the cigarette and make the fire. She gestures to me to kiss her butt.

"Why am I making a fire?" she says. "A fire in advance of a goat. Is this like a wishful fire? No, sorry, I've had it. What, they didn't put it in the Big Slot?"

I scowl at her and shake my head.

"Well, did you at least check the Little Slot?" she says. "Maybe it was a small goat and they really crammed it in. Maybe for once they gave us a nice quail or something."

I roll my eyes, then walk off in a rolling gait to check the Little Slot. Nothing.

"Well, freak this," she says. "I'm going to walk right out of here and see what the hell is up."

But she won't. She knows it and I know it. She sits on her log and smokes and together we wait to hear a clunk in the Big Slot.

About lunch we hit the Reserve Crackers. About dinner we again hit the Reserve Crackers. No heads poke in and there's no clunk in either the Big or Little Slot. Then the quality of light changes and she stands at the door of her Separate Area.

"No goat tomorrow, I'm out of here and down the hill," she says. "I swear to God. You watch."

I go into my Separate Area and put on my footies. I have some cocoa and take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form.

Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not.

I fax it in.

Next morning, no goat. Also no note. Janet sits on her log and smokes, and together we wait to hear a clunk in the Big Slot. No heads poke in and there's no clunk in either the Big or Little Slot.

About lunch we hit the Reserve Crackers. About dinner we again hit the Reserve Crackers. Then the quality of light changes and she stands at the door of her Separate Area.

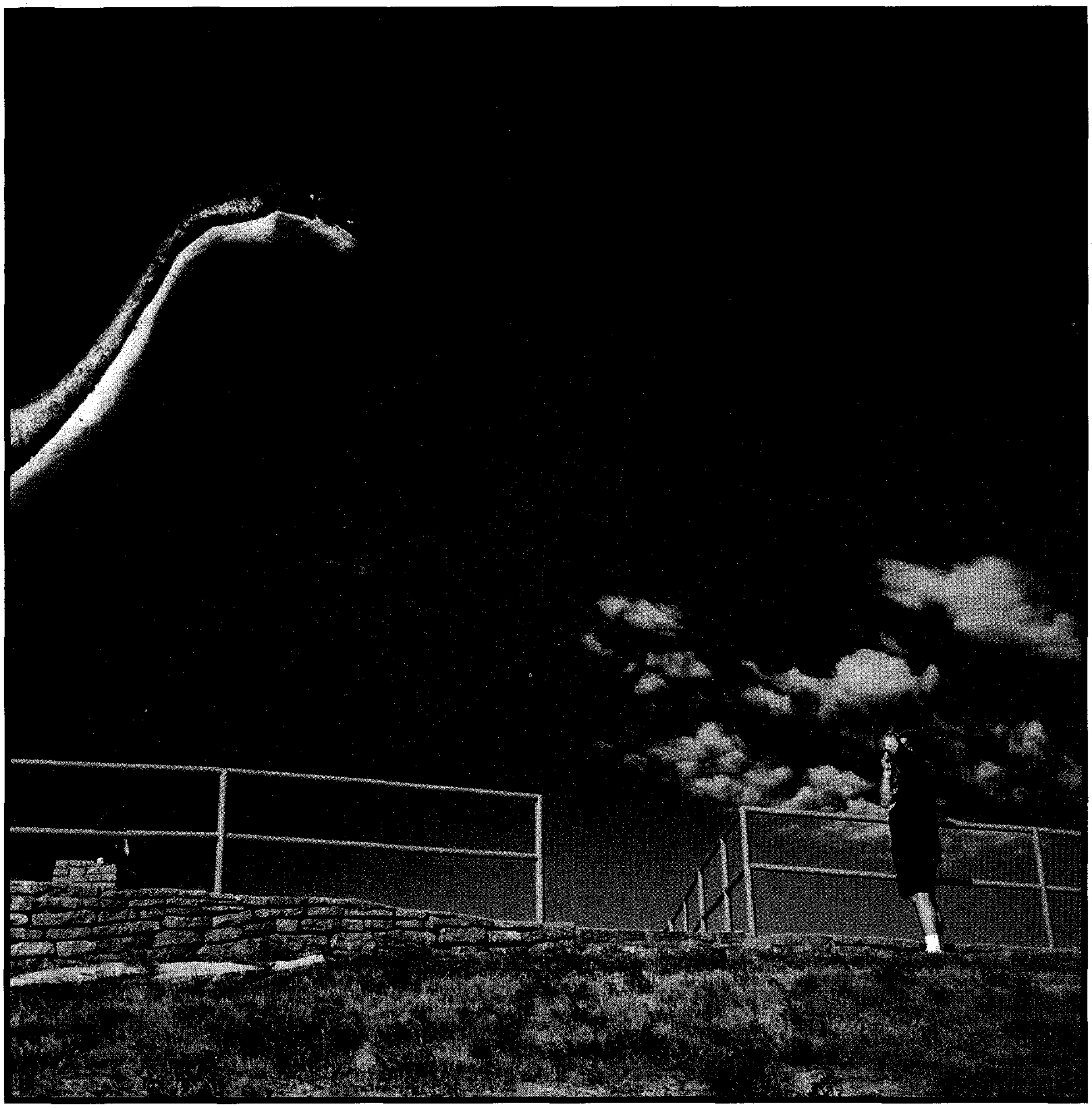
"Crackers, crackers, crackers!" she says, pitifully. "Jesus, I wish you'd talk to me. I don't see why you won't. I'm about to go bonkers. We could at least have some fun. Maybe play some Scrabble."

Scrabble.

I wave good night and give her a grunt.

"Bastard," she says, and hits me with the flint. She's a good thrower and I almost say ow. Instead I put on my footies and tidy up. I have some cocoa. I take

GRETA PRATT, "DINOSAUR PARK, RAPID CITY, SD" (1998)



out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form.

Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not.

I fax it in.

In the morning in the Big Slot there's a nice fat goat. Also a note: *Ha-ha!* it says. *Sorry about the no goat and all. A little mixup. In the future, when you look in here for a goat on every occasion you will find a goat, and not a note. Or maybe both. Ha-ha! Happy eating!*

I skin the goat briskly with the flint. Janet comes in, smiles when she sees the goat, and makes, very quickly, a nice little fire, and does not say one English word all morning and even traces a few of our pictographs with a wettened finger, as if awestruck at their splendid beauty and so on. Around noon she comes over and looks at the cut on my arm, from where she threw the flint. "You gonna live?" she says. "Sorry, man, really sorry, I just like lost it."

I give her a look. She cans the English, then starts wailing in grief and sort of hunkers down in apology.

The goat tastes super after two days of crackers. No one pokes their head in.

Once, back in the days when people still poked their heads in, this guy poked his head in.

"Whoa," he said. "These are some very cramped living quarters. This really makes you appreciate the way we live now. Do you have Call Waiting? Ha-ha! I pity you guys. And also, and yet, I thank you guys, who were my precursors, right? Is that your point? You were doing the best you could? Just like I am? Someday some guy representing me will probably be in there, and some punk who I'm precursor of will be hooting at me, asking why my shoes were made out of dead cows and so forth? Because in that future time, wearing dead skin on your feet will seem to them like barbarity, just like you dragging that broad around by her hair seems to us like barbarity, although to me not that much, after living with my wife fifteen years. Ha-ha! Have a good one!"

I never drag Janet around by the hair. Too cliché.

Just then his wife poked her head

in. "Stinks in there," she said, and yanked her head out.

"That's the roasting goat," her husband said. "Everything wasn't all prettied up. When you ate meat, it was like you were eating actual meat, the flesh of a dead animal, an animal that maybe had been licking your hand just a few hours before."

"I would never do that," said the wife.

"You do it now, bozo!" said the man. "You just pay someone to do the dirty work. The slaughtering? The skinning?"

"I do not either," said the wife.

"Ever heard of a slaughterhouse?" the husband said. "Ha-ha! Gotcha! What do you think goes on in there?"

"That's different," she said. "Those animals were raised for slaughter. Plus I cook them in an oven, I don't squat there in my underwear with smelly smoke blowing all over me."

"Thank Heaven for small favors," he said. "Joking! I'm joking."

"Plus where do they poop," she said.

"Ask them," said the husband. "Ask them where they poop, if you so choose. You paid your dime. That is certainly your prerogative."

"I don't believe I will," said the wife.

"Well, I'm not shy," said the husband, poking his head in. "O.K., so where do you poop?"

"We have disposable bags that mount on a sort of rack," said Janet.

"Ah," he said. "They poop in bags that mount on racks."

"Wonderful," said his wife. "I'm the richer for that information."

"But hold on," the husband said. "In the old times, like when the cave was real and all, where then did they go? I take it there were no disposal bags in those times, if I'm right."

"In those times they just went out in the woods," said Janet.

"Ah," he said. "That makes sense."

You see what I mean about Janet? When addressed directly, we're supposed to cower shrieking in the corner, but instead she answers twice in English?

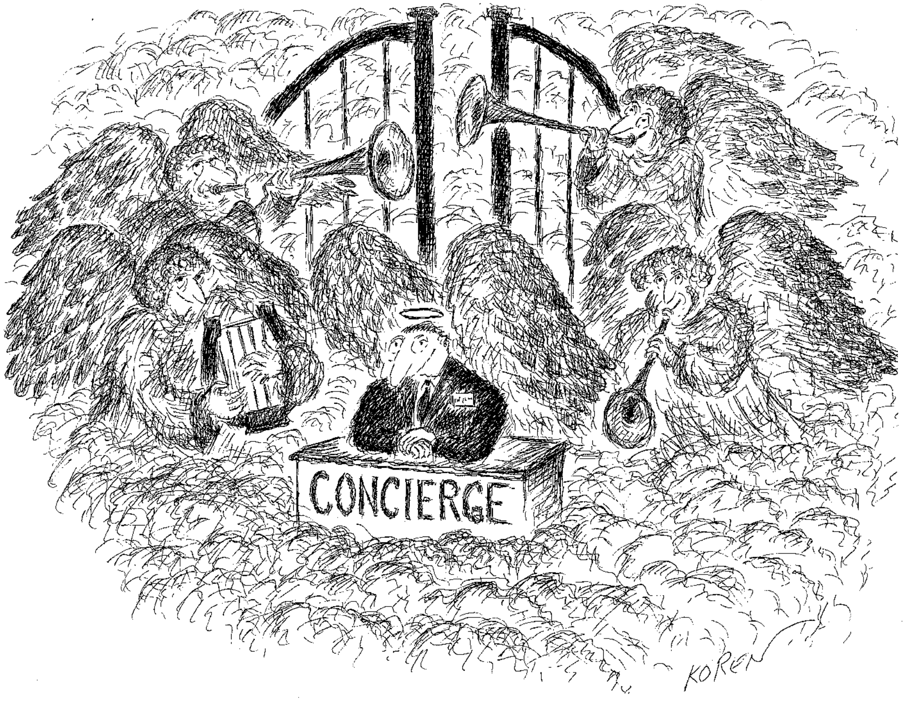
I gave her a look.

"Oh, he's O.K.," she whispered. "He's no narc. I can tell."

In a minute in came a paper airplane: our Client Vignette Evaluation. Under Overall Impression he'd written: "A-O.K.! Very nice." Under Learning Value he'd written: "We learned where they pooped. Both old days and now."

I added it to our pile, then went into my Separate Area and put on my footies. I filled out my Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form. Did I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I did not. How did I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Were there any Situations which required Mediation? There were not.

I faxed it in.



This morning is the morning I empty our Human Refuse bags and the trash bags and the bag from the bottom of the sleek metal hole where Janet puts her used feminine items. For this I get an extra sixty a month. Plus it's always nice to get out of the cave.

I knock on the door of her Separate Area.

"Who is it?" she asks, playing dumb.

She knows very well who it is. I stick in my arm and wave around a trash bag.

"Go for it," she says.

She's in there washing her armpits with a washcloth. The room smells like her, only more so. I add the trash from her wicker basket to my big white bag. I add her bag of used feminine items to my big white bag. I take three bags labelled "Caution Human Refuse" from the corner and add them to my big pink bag labelled "Caution Human Refuse."

I mime to her that I dreamed of a herd that covered the plain like the grass of the earth, they were as numerous as grasshoppers and yet the meat of their humps resembled each a tiny mountain, etc., etc.

"Are you going?" she shouts. "Are you going now? Is that what you're saying?"

I nod.

"Christ, so go already," she says. "Have fun. Bring back some mints."

She has worked very hard these many months to hollow out a little rock in which to hide her mints and her smokes. Mints mints mints. Smokes smokes smokes. No matter how long we're in here together I will never get the hots for her. She's fifty and has large feet and sloping shoulders and a pinched little face and chews with her mouth open. Sometimes she puts on big ugly glasses in the cave and does a crossword: very verboten.

Out I go, with the white regular trash bag in one hand and our mutual big pink Human Refuse bag in the other.

Next morning in the Big Slot is a goat and in the Little Slot a rabbit and a note addressed to Distribution: *Please accept this extra food as a token of what our esteem is like*, the note says. *Please know that each one of you is very special to us, and is never forgotten about,* *and would be kept, if you could be, if that would benefit everyone. But it wouldn't, or we would do it, wouldn't we? So as we meld into our sleeker new organization, what an excellent opportunity to adjust our Staff Mix. Although in this time of scarcity and challenge, some must perhaps go, the upside of this is, some must stay, and perhaps it will be you. Let us hope it will be you, each and every one of you, but no, as stated previously, it won't, that is impossible.*

"Jeez," says Janet. "Let the freaking canning begin." I give her a look.

"Oh all right all right," she says. "Ooga mooga. Ooga ooga mooga. Is that better?"

She can be as snotty as she likes, but a Remixing is nothing to sneeze at.

I skin and roast the goat and the rabbit. After breakfast she puts on her Walkman and starts a letter to her sister: very verboten.

Around noon the fax in my Separate Area makes the sound it makes when a fax is coming in. Getting it would require leaving the cave and entering my Separate Area during working hours.

"Christ, go get it," Janet says. "Are you nuts? It might be from Louise."

I go get it. It's from Louise.

Nelson doing better today, it says. Not *much new swelling. Played trucks and ate three pcs bologna. Asked about you. No temperature, good range of motion in both legs and arms.*

Sounds good, I fax back. *How are other kids?*

Kids are kids are kids, she faxes back. *Driving me nuts. Always talking.*

Nelson's three. Three months ago his muscles stiffened up. The medicine they put him on to loosen his muscles did somewhat loosen them, but also it caused them to swell, and Dr. Evans had to admit that whatever he had it wasn't what they'd originally thought it was. So we're watching him closely.

"You know I'm freaking rooting for you guys," Janet says when I return to the cave.

Sometimes she can be pretty nice.

First thing next morning Greg Nordstrom pokes his head in and asks me to brunch. Which is a first.

"How about me?" says Janet.

"Ha-ha!" says Nordstrom. "Not you. Not today. Maybe soon, however!"

I follow him out. Very bright sun. About fifty feet from the cave there's a red paper screen that says "Patience! Under Construction" and we go behind it.

"You'll be getting your proxy forms in your Slot soon," he says, spreading out some bagels on a blanket. "Fill out the proxy as you see fit, everything's fine, just vote, do it boldly, exert your choice, it has to do with your stock option. Are you vested? Great to be vested. Just wait until you are. It really feels like a Benefit. You'll see why they call Benefits Benefits when, every month, *ka-ching*, that option money kicks up a notch. Man, we're lucky."

"Yes," I say.

"I am and you are," he says. "Not everyone is. Some aren't. Those being removed in the Staff Remixing, no. But you're not being removed. At least I don't think so. Now, Janet, I have some concerns about Janet, I don't know what they're going to do about Janet. It's not me, it's them, but what can I do? I want you to speak frankly. Are there problems? Problems we can maybe help correct? It's not negative to point out a defect. Actually, it's positive, because then the defect can be fixed. What's negative is to withhold valuable info. Are you? Withholding valuable info? I hope not. Look, you know and I know Janet's got some performance issues, so what an exciting opportunity for you to admit it and me to hear it loud and clear. Super!"

For six years she's been telling me about her Pap smears and her kid in rehab and her mother in Fort Wayne who has a bad valve and can't stand up or her lungs fill with blood, etc., etc.

"I haven't really noticed any problems," I say.

"Blah blah blah," he says. "What kind of praise is that? Empty praise? I'd caution against empty praise. Because empty praise is what? A lie. And a lie is what? Negative. You're like the opposite of that little boy who cried Wolf. You're like that little boy who cried No Wolf when a wolf was in fact chewing on his leg, by the name of Janet. Because what have I recently seen? Having seen your Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Forms, I haven't seen on them a single discouraging word. Not one. How did you rate your Partner over all? Very good, always, every single day, even when, in one instance, she told a guy where you folks pooped. In English. In the cave. I have documentation, because I read that guy's Client Vignette Evaluation."

It gets very quiet. The wind blows and the paper screen tips a bit. The bagels look good, but we're not eating them.

"Look," he says. "I know it's hard to be objective about people we come to daily know, but in the big picture who benefits when the truth is not told? Does Janet? How can Janet know she's not being her best self if someone doesn't tell her? And with Janet not being her best self, is the organization healthier? And with the organization not being healthier, and the organization being that thing that ultimately puts the food in your face, you can easily see that by lying about Janet's behavior you are taking the food out of your own face. Who puts the cash in your hand to buy that food in your face? We do. What do we want of you? To tell the truth. That's it. That is all."

We sit awhile in silence.

"Very simple," he says. "A nonbrainer."

A white fuzzy thing lands in my arm hair. I pick it out. Down it falls.

"Sad," he says. "Sad is all it is. We live in a beautiful world, full of beautiful flowers and birds and super people, but also a few regrettable bad apples, such as that questionable Janet. Do I hate her? Do I want her killed? Gosh no. I think she has some very nice traits. But guess what, I'm not paying her to have nice traits, I'm paying her to do consistently good work. Is she? She is not. And here are you, saddled with a sub par colleague. She's stopping your rise. People are talking about you in our lounge. Sometimes I could just slap her for what she's doing to you."

"She's a friend," I say.

"You know what it's like?" he says. "The Bible. Remember that part in the Bible when Christ or God says that any organization of two or more of us is a body? I think that is so true. Our body has a rotten toe by the name of Janet, who is turning black and stinking up the joint, and next to that bad stinking toe lives her friend the good nonstinker toe, who for some reason insists on holding its tongue, if a toe can be said to have a tongue. Speak up, little toe, let the brain know the state of the rot, so we can rush down and do what is necessary to stop Janet from stinking. What will be needed? We do not yet know. Maybe some antiseptic, maybe a nice sharp saw with which to lop off Janet. For us to know, what must you do? Tell the truth. That's it. That is all. But enough mean and sad talk, I know my point has been gotten by you. Now for the fun. The eating. Eating the good food I have broughten. That's fun, isn't it?"

We start to eat. It's fun.

"Broughten," he says. "The good food I have broughten. Is it brought or broughten?"

"Brought," I say.

"The good food I have brought," he says. "Broughten."

Back in the cave, Janet's made a nice fire. "So what did numbnuts want?" she says. "Are you fired?"

I shake my head no.

"Is he in love with you?" she says. "Does he want to go out with you?"

I shake my head no.

"Is he in love with me?" she says. "Does he want to go out with me? Am I fired?"

I do not shake my head no.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, go back," she says. "I'm fired?"

I shake my head no.

"But I'm in the shit?" she says. "I'm somewhat in the shit?"

I shrug.

"Will you freaking talk to me?" she says. "This is important. Don't be a dick for once."

I do not consider myself a dick and I do not appreciate being called a dick, in the cave, in English, and the truth is, if she would try a little harder not to talk in the cave, she would not be so much in the shit.

I hold up one finger, like wait a sec, then go into my Separate Area and write her a note: *Nordstrom is unhappy with you*, it says. *And unhappy with me because I have been lying for you on my DPPEFs. So I am going to start telling the truth. And, as you know, if I tell the truth about you, you will be a goner, unless you start acting better. Therefore please start acting better. Sorry I couldn't say this in the cave but as you know we are not supposed to speak English in the cave. I enjoy working with you. We just have to get this thing straightened out.*

Sitting on her log she reads my note. "Time to pull head out of ass, I guess," she says.

I give her a thumbs-up.

Next morning I go to the Big Slot and find it goatless. Also there is no note.

Janet comes out and hands me a note and makes, very quickly, a nice little fire.

I really apreciate what you did, it says. *That you tole me the truth. Your a real pal and are going to see how good I can be.*

I count out twenty Reserve Crackers each and she very convincingly pretends to catch and eat small bugs. After breakfast we work on the pictographs. After lunch she goes to the doorway and starts barking out sounds meant to indicate that a very impressive herd of feeding things is thundering past.

All day no one pokes their head in.

Then the quality of light changes and she stands at the door of her Separate Area giving me a smile, like: It's actually sort of fun doing it right, isn't it?

I take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form. For once it's easy. Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not. Then I write Nordstrom a note:

Per our conversation, it says, *I took the liberty of bringing Janet up to speed. Since that time she has been doing wonderful work, as reflected in my* (*now truthful!!*) *Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Forms. Thank you for your frankness. Also, I apologize for that period during which I was less than truthful on my DPPEFs. I can see now just how negative that was.*

A bit of ass-kissing, yes. But I've got some making up to do.

I fax it in.

Late in the night my fax makes the sound it makes when a fax is coming in. From Nordstrom: *What?* it says. *You told her? Did I tell you to tell her? And now you have the nerve to say she is doing good? Why should I believe you when you say she is doing good when all that time she was doing so bad you always said she was doing so good? Oh you have hacked me off. Do you know what I hate? A liar.* SO DON'T LIE ANYMORE. *Do you really think I care about how she is?* I KNOW *how she is. She is* BAD. *But what I need is for you to* SAY IT. *For reasons of documentation. Do you have any idea how hard it is to fire a gal, not to mention an old gal, not to mention an old gal with so many years of service under her ancient withered belt? There is so much you don't know, about the Remixing, about our plans! Do not even answer me, I am too mad to read it.*

Which is not what I had in mind. No doubt my relationship with Nordstrom has been somewhat damaged. But O.K. Janet is now doing better and I am now telling the truth. So things are as they should be. And I'm sure that, in the long run, Nordstrom will appreciate what I've accomplished.

Next morning I go to the Big Slot and again find it goatless. Again no note.

Janet comes out and makes, very quickly, a nice little fire.

We squat and eat our Reserve Crackers while occasionally swatting one another with our hands. We get in a mock squabble and scurry around the cave, bent over and shrieking. I pound a rock against a rock in rage, indicating that I intend to toss some dirt in her face.

Someone pokes his head in. Young guy, kind of goofy-looking.

"Bradley?" Janet says. "Holy shit."

"Hey, nice greeting, Ma," the guy says, and walks in. He's not supposed to walk in. No one's supposed to walk in. I can't remember a time when anyone has ever just walked in.

"Fucking stinks in here," he says.

"Don't you *even* come into my workplace and start swearing," Janet says.

"Yeah, right, Ma," he says. "Like you never came into my workplace and started swearing."

"Like you ever had a workplace," she says. "Like you ever worked."

"Like jewelry-making wasn't work," he says.

"Oh, Bradley, you are so full of it," she says. "You didn't have no freaking jewels. And no customers. You never made a single piece of jewelry. You just sat moping in the basement."

Just our luck: our first Guest in two weeks and it's a relative.

I clear my throat. I give her a look.

"Give us five freaking minutes, will you, Mr. Tightass?" she says. "This is my kid here."

"You definitely swore at my workplace, Ma," he says. "I remember one time you came down into the basement and said I was a fucking asshole for wasting my time trying to make my dream come true of being a jewelry maker."

"Oh bullshit," she says. "I never once called you a asshole. And I definitely did not say fucking. I never say fuck. I quit that a long time ago. You ever hear me say fuck?"

She looks at me. I shake my head no. She never says fuck. When she means fuck she says freak. She is very very consistent about this.

"What?" says Bradley. "He don't talk?"

"He plays by the rules," she says. "Maybe you should try it sometime."

"I was trying," he says. "But still they kicked me out."

"Kicked you out of what?" she says. "Wait a minute, wait a minute, go back. They kicked you out of what? Of rehab?"

"It's nothing bad, Ma!" he shouts. "You don't have to make me feel ashamed about it. I feel bad enough, being called a thief by Mr. Doe in front of the whole group."

"Jesus, Bradley," she says. "How are you supposed to get better if you get kicked out of rehab? What did you steal this time? Did you steal a stereo again? Who's Mr. Doe?"

"I didn't steal nothing, Ma," he says. "Doe's my counsellor. I borrowed a TV. The TV from the lounge. I just felt like I could get better a lot faster if I had a TV in my room. So I took control of my recovery. Is that so bad? I thought that's what I was there for, you know? I'm not saying I did everything perfect. Like I probably shouldn't of sold it."

"You sold it?" she says.

"There was nothing good ever on!" he says. "If they showed good programs I just know I would've gotten better. But no. It was so boring. So I decided to throw everybody a party, because they were all supporting me so well, by letting me keep the TV in my room? And so, you know, I sold the TV, for the party, and was taking the bucks over to the Party Place, to get some things for

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TAKES

RICHARD MERKIN

The currents of the Solomon Islands are queer. The tide shoves and sucks through the islands and makes the currents curl in odd patterns. It was a fateful pattern into which Jack Kennedy drifted. He drifted in it all night. His mind was blank, but his fist was tightly clenched on the kapok around the lantern. The current moved in a huge circle—west past Gizo, then north and east past Kolombangara, then south into Ferguson Passage. Early in the morning the sky turned from black to gray, and so did Kennedy's mind. Light came to both at about six. Kennedy looked around and saw that he was exactly where he had been the night before when he saw the flares beyond Gizo. For a second time, he started home. He thought for a while that he had lost his mind and that he only imagined that he was repeating his attempt to reach the island. But the chill of the water was real enough, the lantern was real, his progress was measurable. He made the reef, crossed the lagoon, and got to the first island. He lay on the beach awhile. He found that his lantern did not work anymore, so he left it and started back to the next island, where his men were. This time the trip along the reef was awful. He had discarded his shoes, and every step on the coral was painful. This time the swim across the gap where the current had caught him the night before seemed endless. But the current had changed; he made the island. He crawled up on the beach. He was vomiting when his men came up to him. He said, "Ross, you try it tonight." Then he passed out.

—John Hersey, "Survival" (A Reporter at Large), June 17, 1944

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BONNARD'S REFLECTION

His bedrooms reek of sex and melancholy:
whose leg flexes across a shoulder, whose
hot hand finds a thigh, arms around the
smooth swerves of whose back? We clutter,
he says, and choke. We fail love, telling
all sorts of lies. The whole pink globe
of the cherry tree pressed against one window,
blotting the sky out. Eros erodes us. This
is where *itch* begins to rhyme with *ache:*
one more nail in whose coffin? You'll wait
and see. Flowers on the down comforter
already hissing and whispering what it is
they know to the flowers on the dawn curtain.

—*Eamon Grennan*

the party, some hats and tooters and stuff like that, but then I sort of all of a sudden wanted some substances. And then I ran into this guy with some substances. That guy totally fucked me! He didn't care one bit about my recovery."

"You sold the rehab TV to buy drugs," she says.

"To buy substances, Ma, why can't you get it right?" he says. "The way we name things is important, Ma, Doe taught me that in counselling. Look, I know you wish you had a perfect son, but you don't, you have an inadvertent substance misuser who sometimes makes bad judgments, like borrowing and selling a TV to buy substances."

"Or rings and jewels," says Janet. "My rings and jewels."

"Fuck, Ma, that was a long time ago!" he says. "Why do you have to keep bringing that old shit up? Doe was so right. For you to win, I have to lose. Like when I was a kid and in front of the whole neighborhood you called me an animal torturer? That really hurt. That caused a lot of my problems. We were working on that right before I left."

"You were torturing a cat," she says. "With a freaking prod."

"A prod I built myself in metal shop," he says. "Of course you never mention that."

"A prod you were heating with a Sterno cup," she says.

"Go ahead, build your case," he says. "Beat up on me as much as you want, I don't have a choice."

"Well, you can't stay here," she says.

"Fine, Ma," he says. "You don't want me staying here, I won't stay here. I'll turn tricks and go live in a ditch. Is that what you want?"

"Turn tricks?" she says. "Who said anything about turning tricks?"

"It's what we eventually come to, our need for substances is so great," he says.

"Well, I don't want you turning tricks," she says. "That I don't go for."

"But living in a ditch is O.K.," he says.

"If you want to live in a ditch, live in a ditch," she says.

"I don't want to live in a ditch," he says. "I want to turn my life around. But it would help me turn my life around if I had a little money. Like twenty bucks. So I can go back and get those party supplies. The tooters and all? I want to make it up to my friends."

"Is that what this is about?" she says. "You want money? Well, I don't have twenty bucks. And you don't need tooters to have a party."

"But I want tooters," he says. "Tooters make it more fun. Ma, please. You've always been there for me. And I've got a bad feeling about this. Like it might be my last chance."

She pulls me off to one side. "I'll pay you back on payday," she says.

I give her a look.

"Come on, man," she says. "He's my son. You know how it is. You got a sick kid, I got a sick kid."

My feeling is, yes and no. My sick kid is three. My sick kid isn't a con man. Although at this point it's worth twenty bucks to get the guy out of the cave. I go to my Separate Area and get the twenty bucks. I give it to her and she gives it to him.

"Excellent!" he says, and goes bounding out the door. "A guy can always count on his ma."

Janet goes straight to her Separate Area. The rest of the afternoon I hear sobbing. Sobbing or laughing. Probably sobbing.

When the quality of light changes I go to my Separate Area. I make cocoa. I tidy up. I take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form. This is really pushing it. Her kid comes into the cave in street clothes, speaks English in the cave, she speaks English back, they both swear many many times, she spends the whole afternoon weeping in her Separate Area.

Then again, what am I supposed to do, rat out a friend with a dying mom on the day she finds out her screwed-up son is even more screwed up than she originally thought?

Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Are there any Situations which require Mediation? There are not.

I fax it in.

Next morning in the Big Slot is no goat. Just a note. From Janet: *Bradley lied about the tooters and bought some you-know-what*, it says. *Big suprise right? Is in jail. Stupid dumbass. Got a fax last night. With this going on no way am I caving it up today. I'm sorry but I just cant, don't narc me out, O.K.? Just this one last time. I'm taking a Sick Day.*

She can't do that. She can't take a Sick Day if she's not sick. She can't take a Sick Day because she's sad about someone she loves being in jail.

I count out ten Reserve Crackers and work all morning on the pictographs.

Around noon the door to her Separate Area flies open. She looks weird. Her hair is sticking up and she's wearing an "I'm with Stupid" sweatshirt over her cavewoman robe and her breath smells like whiskey. Janet is wasted? Wasted in the cave?

"What I have here in this album?" she says. "Baby pictures of that fucking rat Bradley. Back when I loved him so much. Back before he was a druggie. See how cute? See how smart he looked?"

She shows me the album. He actually does not look cute or smart. He looks as sneaky as he looked the other day, only smaller.

"God, you just love the little shits no matter what, don't you?" she says. "You know what I'm saying? If Bradley's dad woulda stuck around it might've been better. Bradley never knew him. I always used to say he took one look at Bradley and ran off. Maybe I shouldn't of said that. At least not in front of Bradley. Wow. I've had a few snorts. You want a snort? Come on, live a little! This is the best Sick Day I ever took."

I guide her back to her Separate Area and push her sternly in.

"Come on in!" she says. "I'm lonely in here. You want a Ballbuster, Señor Tightass?"

I do not want a Ballbuster.

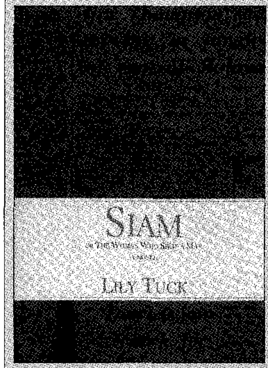
What I want is for her to stay in her Separate Area keeping very quiet until she sobers up.

All day I sit alone in the cave. When the quality of light changes I go into my Separate Area and take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form.

When I was a kid, Dad worked for Kenner Beef. Loins would drop from this belt and he'd cut through this purple tendon and use a sort of vise to squeeze some blood into a graduated beaker for testing, then wrap the loin in a sling and swing it down to Finishing. Dad's partner was Fred Lank. Lank had a metal plate in his skull and went into these funks where he'd forget to cut the purple tendon and fail to squeeze out the blood and instead of placing the loin in the sling would just sort of drop it down on Finishing. When Lank went into a funk, Dad covered for him by doing double loins. Sometimes Dad would do double loins for days at a time. When Dad died, Lank sent Mom a check for a thousand dollars, with a note: "Please keep," it said. "The man did so much for me."

Which is I think part of the reason I'm having trouble ratting Janet out.

Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I do not. How do I rate my Partner over all? Very good. Are there any



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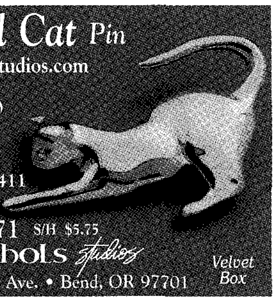

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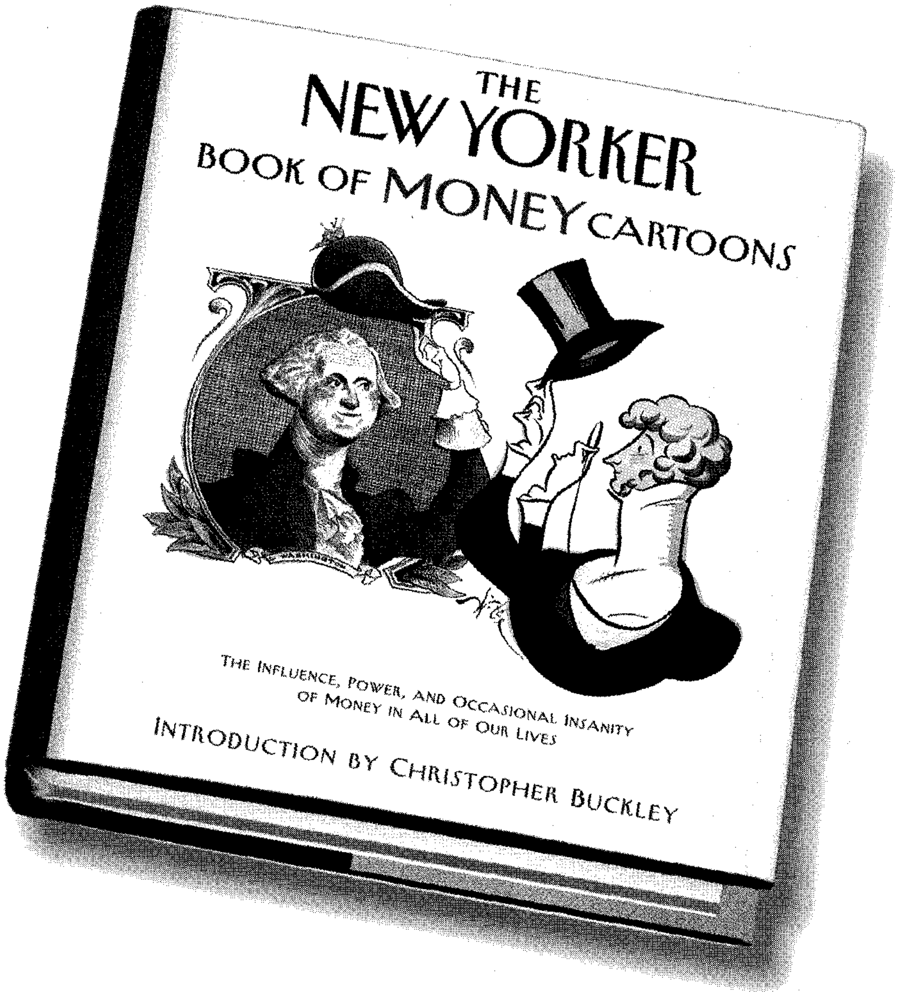
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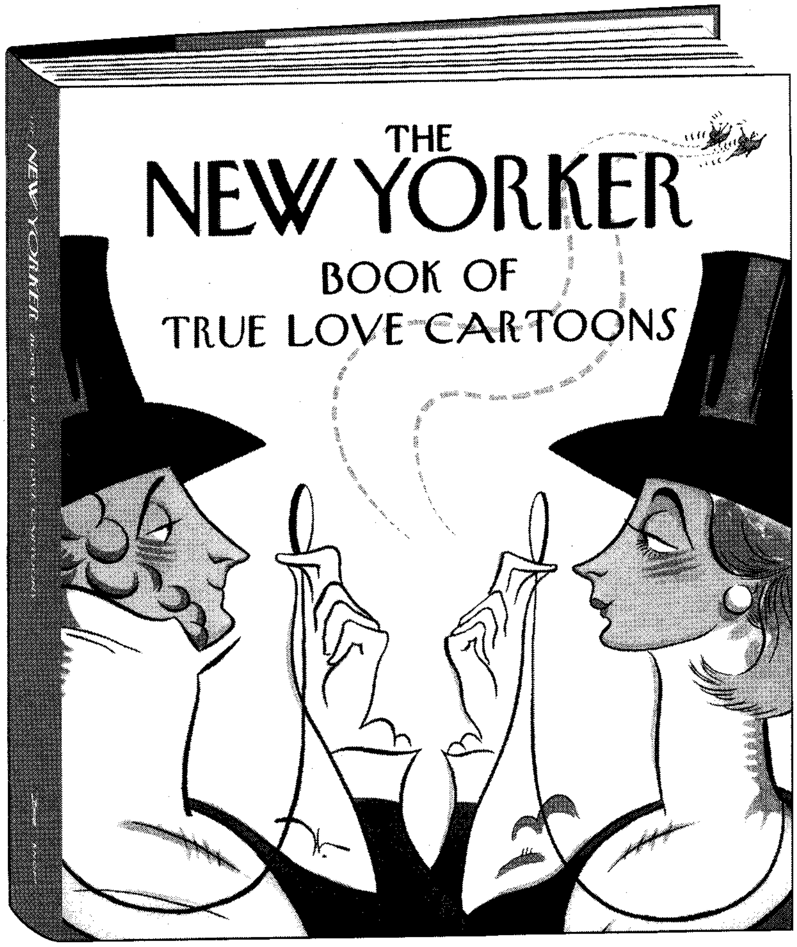
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Here is meeting made easy at the "Mate Mart"... here is Rilke as an aphrodisiac... marriage as a daunting threshold ("And do you, Rebecca, promise to make love only to Richard, month after month, year after year, and decade after decade, until one of you is dead?").

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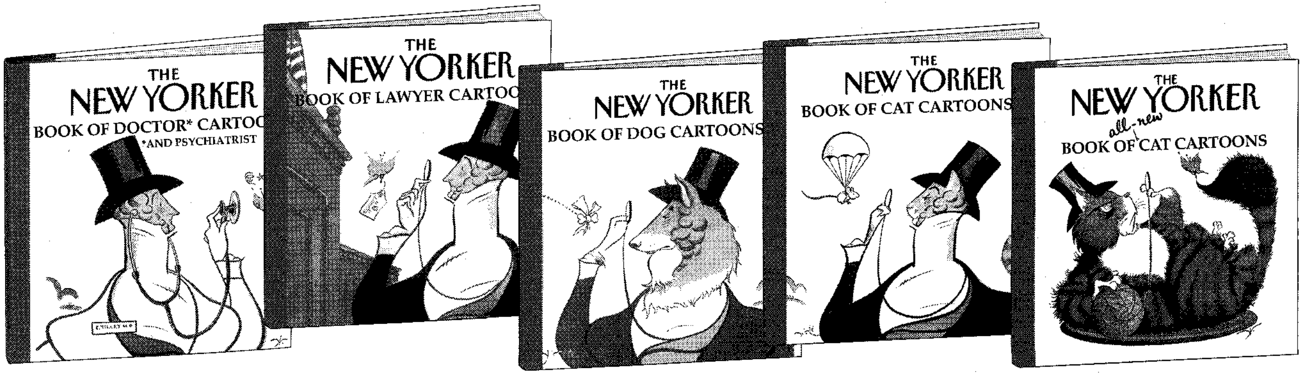
What else is funny?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Situations which require Mediation? There are not.

I fax it in.

For several hours the next morning Janet does not come out. Probably she is too hung over. Around eleven she appears.

"I know, I know, I fucked up," she says. "I was a little buzzed. A little buzzed in the cave. Boohoo. Don't tell me, you narced me out, right?"

I give her a look.

"You didn't?" she says. "Wow. You're the best, man. And starting right now, no more screwups. This time, for real."

Just then there's a huge clunk in the Big Slot.

"Excellent!" she says. "I hope it's a big thing of Motrin."

But it's not a big thing of Motrin. It's a goat. A weird-looking goat. Actually a plastic goat. With a pre-drilled hole for the spit to go through. In the mouth is a Baggie and in the Baggie is a note:

"In terms of austerity," it says. "No goat today. In terms of verisimilitude, mount this fake goat and tend as if real. Mount well above fire to avoid burning. In event of burning, leave area, burning plastic may release harmful fumes."

I mount the fake goat on the spit and Janet sits on the boulder with her head in her hands. Around two the fax starts making the sound it makes when a fax is coming in. I look at Janet. She looks at me.

I go in.

But it's not for me, it's for her.

Ms. Foley's fax appears to be inoperative? the cover letter says. *Kindly please forward the attached.*

Please be informed, the attached fax says, *I did my very best in terms of your son and this appeared, in my judgment, to be an excellent plea bargain. Ten years is not all that long when you consider all the bad things that he has done. In the grand scheme of things such as geology ten years is not so very long really.*

Sincerely,

Evan Joeller, Esq.

I take the fax out to Janet, who reads it while sitting on her log. I go over and put my hand on her shoulder, like: Are you O.K.? She pushes my hand away roughly and starts frantically pretending to catch and eat small bugs. Just then someone pokes their head in. Young guy, round head, expensive-looking glasses.

"Bibby, hand me up Cole," he says. "So he can see. Cole-Cole, can you see? Here. Daddy will hold you up."

A little kid's head appears alongside the dad's head.

"Isn't this cool, Cole?" says the dad. "Aren't you glad Mommy and Daddy brought you? Remember Daddy told you? How people used to live in caves?"

"They did not," the little boy says. "You're wrong."

"Bibby, did you hear that?" the dad says. "He just said I'm wrong. About people living in caves."

"I heard it," says a woman from outside. "Cole, people really did use to live in caves. Daddy's not wrong."

"Daddy's always wrong," says the little boy.

"He just said I'm always wrong," the dad says. "Did you hear that? Did you write that down? In the memory book? Talk about assertive! I should be so assertive. Wouldn't Norm and Larry croak if I was suddenly so assertive?"

"I want to stab you, Dad," says the little boy. "With a sharp sword, you're so dumb."

"Ha-ha!" says the dad. "But don't forget, Cole-Cole, the pen is mightier than the sword! Remember I taught you that? Wouldn't it be better to compose an insulting poem, if you had something negative about me you want to convey?"

"What's your name?" the little boy then yells at me.

I cower and shriek in the corner.

"What's your name I said!" the little boy shouts at me. "I hate you!"

"Now, Cole-Cole," says the dad. "Let's not use the word 'hate,' O.K., buddy? Remember what I told you? About hate being the nasty dark crayon and love being the pink?"

"You are not acceptable!" the kid shouts at me.

"Ha-ha, oh my God!" says the dad. "Bibby, did you get that? Did you write that down? Write down how mad he is. Look how red his face is! Wow, he is really pissed. Cole, good persistence! Bibby, give him a juice box. Also he's got some goo-goo coming out of his nosehole."

"Jesus Christ," Janet mumbles.

I give her my sternest look.

"What was that?" says the dad. "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you. What did you just say?"

"Nothing," Janet says. "I didn't say nothing."

"I heard you very clearly," says the dad. "You said 'Jesus Christ.' You said 'Jesus Christ' because of what I said about the goo-goo in my son's nosehole. Well, first of all, I'm sorry if you find a little boy's nosehole goo-goo sickening, it's perfectly normal, if you had a kid of your own you'd know that, and second of all, since when do cavepeople speak English and know who Jesus Christ is? Didn't the cavepeople predate Christ, if I'm not mistaken?"

"Of course they did," the mom says from outside. "We just came from Christ. Days of Christ. And we're going backward. Toward the exit."

"Look, pal, I got a kid," says Janet. "I seen plenty of snot. I just never called it goo-goo. That's all I'm saying."

"Bibby, get this," the dad says. "Parenting advice from the cavelady. The cavelady apparently has some strong opinions on booger nomenclature. For this I paid eighty bucks? If I want somebody badly dressed to give me a bunch of lip I can go to your mother's house."

"Very funny," says the mom.

"I meant it funny," says the dad.

"I was a good mom," Janet says. "My kid is as good as anybody's kid."

"Hey, share it with us," says the dad.

"Even if he is in jail," says Janet.

"Bibby, get this," says the dad. "The cavelady's kid is in jail."

"Don't you *even* make fun of my kid, you little suckass," says Janet.

"The cavelady just called you a suckass," says the mom.

"A little suckass," says the dad. "And don't think I'm going to forget it."

Soon flying in through the hole where the heads poke in is our wadded-up Client Vignette Evaluation.

Under Learning Value he's written: "Disastrous. We learned that some cavеladies had potty mouths. I certainly felt like I was in the actual Neanderthal days. *Not!*" Under Over-All Impression he's written: "LOSE THE CAVELADY, SHE IS THE WORST."

"Know what I'm doing now?" the guy says. "I'm walking my copy down to the main office. Your ass is grass, lady."

"Oh shit," Janet says and sits on the

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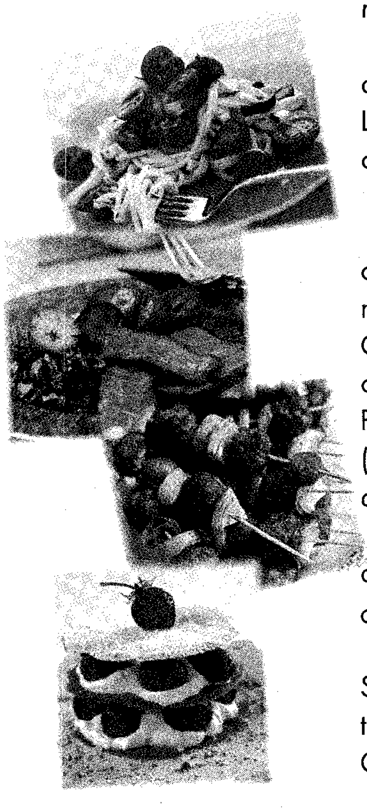

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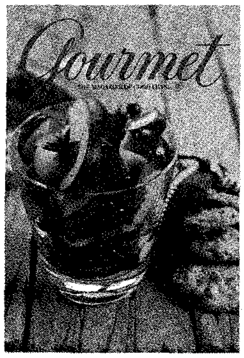

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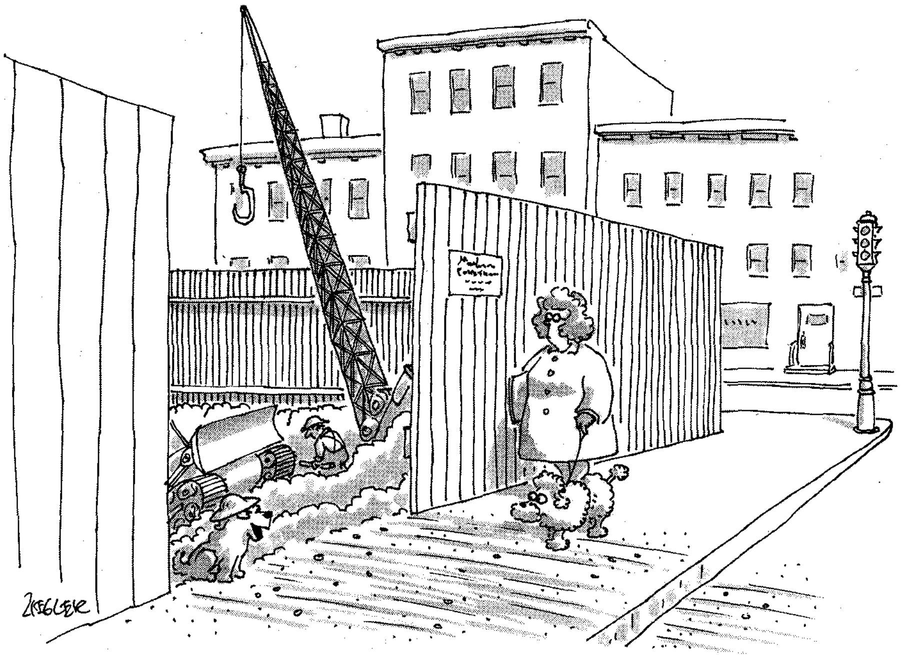

"Hey, baby, what's happenin'? How's about a little kiss, mama? Woof, woof, woof! Ar-oooooooo!"

• •

log. "Shit shit shit. I really totally blew it, didn't I?"

My God, did she ever. She really totally blew it.

"What are you going to do, man?" Janet says. "Are you going to narc me out?"

I give her a look, like: Will you just please shut up?

The rest of the day we sit on our respective logs. When the quality of light changes I go to my Separate Area and take out a Daily Partner Performance Evaluation Form.

A note comes sliding under my door.

I have a idea, it says. *Maybe you could say that ashole made it all up? Like he came in and tryed to get fresh with me and when I wouldnt let him he made it all up? That could work. I think it could work. Please please dont narc me out, if I get fired I'm dead, you know all the shit that's going on with me. Plus you have to admit I was doing pretty good before this.*

She was doing pretty good before this. I think of Nelson. His wispy hair and crooked nose. When I thank him for bravely taking all his medications he always rests his head on my shoulder and says, "No problem." Only he can't say his "R"s. So it's like, "No pwoblem."

Do I note any Attitudinal Difficulties? I write: *Yes.* How do I rate my Partner over all? I write: *Poor.* Are there any Situations which require Mediation? I write: *Today Janet unfortunately interacted negatively with a Guest. Today Janet unfortunately called a Guest a "suckass," in English, in the cave.*

I look it over. It's all true. I fax it in.

A few minutes later my fax makes the sound it makes when a fax is coming in. From Nordstrom:

This should be sufficient! it says. *Super! More than sufficient. Good for you. Feel no guilt. Are you Janet? Is Janet you? I think not. I think that you are you and she is she. You guys are not the same entity. What I suggest? Think of you and Janet as branches on a tree. While it's true that a branch sometimes needs to be hacked off, so what, that is only one branch, it does not kill the tree, and sometimes one branch must die so that the others may live. When we chop one branch, we all become stronger! And that branch on the ground, looking up, has the pleasure of knowing that he or she made the tree better, which I hope Janet will do. Although knowing her? With her crappy attitude? Probably she will lie on the ground wailing and gnashing her leaves while saying swear words up at us. But who cares! She is gone. She is a goner. And we have you to thank. So thanks! This is the way organizations grow and thrive, via small courageous contributions by cooperative selfless helpers. Oh and also, you might want to be out of the cave around ten, as that is when the deed will be done.*

Thanks so much!

Greg N.

I lie there counting and recounting the acoustic tiles on the ceiling of my darkened Separate Area.

One hundred forty-four.

Next morning is not the morning I empty our Human Refuse bags and the trash bags and the bag from the bottom of the sleek metal hole, but I get up extremely early—in fact, it is still dark—and leave Janet a note saying I've gone to empty our Human Refuse bags, etc., etc., then sneak out of the cave and cross the river via wading, and sit facing away from the cave.

I sit there a long time.

When I get back, Janet's gone and the door to her Separate Area is open and her Separate Area is empty.

Except for a note taped to the wall:

You freak you break my heart, it says. *Thanks a million. What the fuck am I supposed to do now? I cant believe after all this time you tern on me. And here I thought you were my frend but you were only interested in your own self. Not that I blame you. I mean, I do and I dont. Actually I do.*

You bastard,

Janet

There are several big clunks in the Big Slot. A goat, some steaks, four boxes of hash browns, caramel corn in a metal tub, several pies, many many bottles of Coke and Sprite. I look at that food a long time. Then I stash it in my Separate Area, for later use. For lunch I have a steak and hash browns and some pie and a Sprite.

Eating hash browns and pie and drinking Sprite in the cave is probably verboten but I feel I've somewhat earned it.

I clean up the mess. I sit on the log. Sort of weird without Janet. Someone pokes their head in. A young woman in a cavewoman robe.

She walks right in and hands me a sealed note. From Nordstrom:

Please meet Linda, it says. *Your total new Partner. Sort of cute, yes? Under that robe is quite a bod, believe me, I saw her in slacks. See why I was trying to get rid of Janet? But also you will find she is serious. Just like you. See that brow? It is permanent, she had it installed. Like once every six* *months she goes in for a touch-up where they spray it from a can to harden it. I want us now, post-Janet, to really strive for some very strict verisimilitude. You may, for example, wish to consider having such a perma-brow installed on yourself. Anyway, I think you and Linda will get along super. She is at least younger than Janet and not so hard on the eyes.*

I put out my hand and smile.

She frowns at my hand, like: Since when do cavepeople shake hands?

She squats and pretends to be catching and eating small bugs. How she knows how to do that, I do not know. I squat beside her and also pretend to be catching and eating small bugs.

We do this for quite some time. It gets old but she doesn't stop, and all the time she's grunting, and once or twice I could swear she actually catches and eats an actual small bug.

Around noon my fax makes the sound it makes when a fax is coming in. From Louise? Probably. No one faxes me here but Louise, and she only faxes me about Nelson. I stand up. Linda gives me a look. Her brow looks amazing. It has real actual pores on it.

I squat down. I pretend to catch and eat a small bug. The fax stops making the sound it makes when a fax is coming in.

Presumably the fax from Louise is in the tray, waiting for me to read.

Is something wrong? Has something changed with Nelson?

Five more hours and I can enter my Separate Area and find out. Which is fine. Really not a problem. Because I'm Thinking Positive/Saying Positive.

All afternoon we pretend to catch and eat small bugs. We pretend to catch and eat more pretend bugs than could ever actually live in one cave. The number of pretend bugs we pretend to catch and eat would in reality basically fill a cave the size of our cave. It feels like we're racing. At one point she gives me a look, like: Slow down, going so fast is inauthentic. I slow down, monitoring my rate so that I am pretending to catch and eat small bugs at exactly the same rate at which she is pretending to catch and eat small bugs, which seems to me prudent, I mean, there is no way she could have a problem with the way I'm pretending to catch and eat small bugs if I'm doing it exactly the way she's doing it.

No one pokes their head in. ♦

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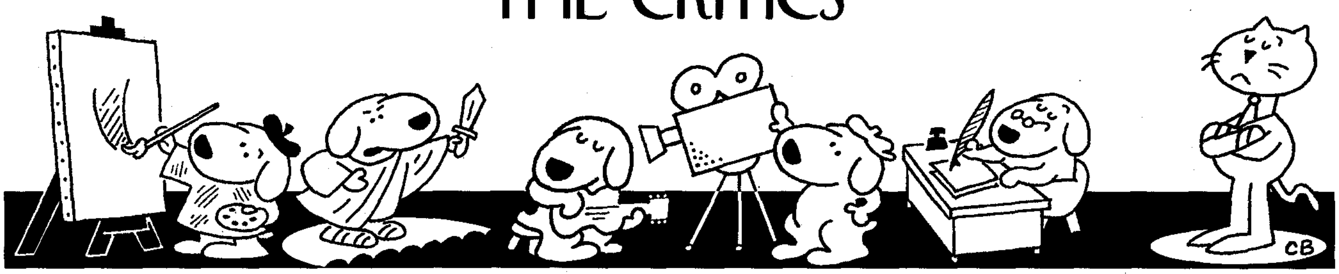


A CRITIC AT LARGE

THE PANORAMIC PIANIST

Maurizio Pollini is in town, making musical connections.

BY CHARLES MICHENER

When the Italian pianist Maurizio Pollini appeared onstage at Carnegie Hall last week, he looked the way he usually does before a recital—like a man hurrying for a train. As he made his way toward the Steinway in the center of the stage, everything about him—the forward tilt of his head, the stiffness of his torso, the immobility of his arms—suggested that all his energy was being conserved for the task at hand. Hardly breaking stride, he made three staccato bows toward the audience. Then he seated himself at the keyboard, lifted his gaze, and, without glancing down, launched into a program that for most of today's concert pianists would be unthinkable.

The traditional recital program is laid out like a menu: a tasty appetizer, followed by a slightly richer second course, a hefty main course, a dessert, and assorted bonbons as encores. Pollini has always rejected this approach in favor of programs that become conversations among composers about issues of musical substance. In this recital, which was part of a series organized by Pollini to survey a thousand years of Western music, the talk was between two immensely sophisticated Frenchmen—Claude Debussy, with his Twelve Études, from 1915, and Pierre Boulez, with his Second Sonata, from 1948.

It was an evening that might have been called "Exploring the Outer Limits of the Piano's Sonic and Expressive Possibilities." Debussy's Études were ostensibly written to develop specific pianistic skills—they have titles like "In Sixths" and "In Contrasting Sonorities"—and, after starting off with a beginner's five-finger exercise, they place extreme demands on digital facility. Pollini, who is generally regarded as having the most impressive technique in the business, met every challenge—the torrential octaves, the shimmering arpeggios—with ease. But there was more going on here than pyrotechnics. Pollini had positioned the Steinway unusually close to the edge of the stage, and, playing with a velvety, shaded touch, he created a coherent, intimate world in which the listener's imagination was set free.

The prospect of a performance of a work by Boulez is still, more than fifty years after he began writing music, scary enough to drive audiences away, and some of Carnegie Hall's seats had been vacated by the time Pollini came out for the second half of the program. When Boulez composed the Second Sonata, at the age of twenty-three, Olivier Messiaen remarked that his protégé had the personality of a "lion that has been flayed alive." He could have been describing the sonata itself. It is so dense and quirky—Boulez has called his music "organized delirium"—that Messiaen's wife, the pianist Yvonne Loriod, burst into tears when she was faced with the prospect of learning it. In 1978, Pollini produced a celebrated recording of the sonata that made child's play of it. Now, twenty-two years later, he seemed more at home than ever. He played the abruptly contrasting passages of fire and rumination with such sure pacing and feeling for the underlying unities of the piece that the program note's claim for it as the twentieth century's answer to Beethoven's monumental "Hammerklavier" Sonata seemed entirely justified.

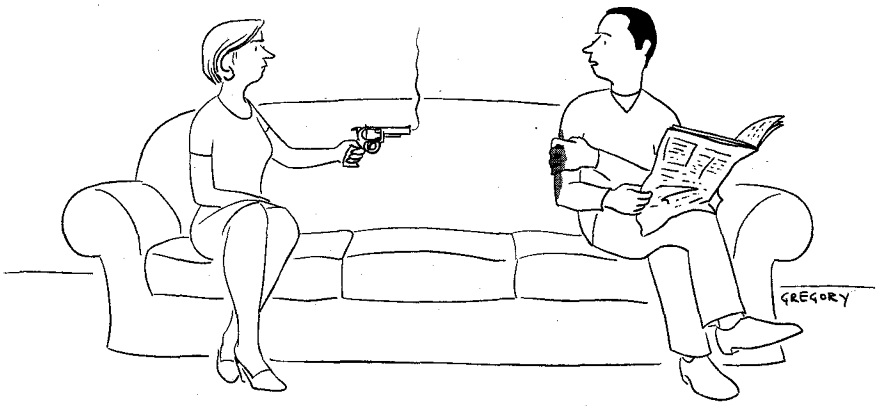
With the Debussy Études still reverberating in the audience's memory, many of Boulez's rambunctious leaps and sonorities seemed downright friendly—a young dog showing an old dog new tricks. Pollini let the older composer have the last word in the encores—three of Debussy's familiar Preludes, which emerged without a trace of their usual glitter or haze, as if they'd been chiselled by Boulez. After playing the final luminous chords of "La Cathédrale Engloutie," Pollini slowly let his hands slip from the keys into his lap, and the audience responded with the highest tribute to a concert performance—a moment of silence before the bravos.

In the eighteen-forties, when Liszt turned the piano recital into a public spectacle, he raised an issue that has persisted to this day: Who is the main attraction at such events, the pianist or the composer? Heinrich Heine described Liszt's ability to induce "histrionic epilepsy" in the audience, and the romantic figure of the keyboard virtuoso as superhero became a model for many of the great pianists who followed, from Paderewski and Busoni to Rubinstein, Horowitz, and Evgeny Kissin. Pollini, with his parting-of-the-waters technique, immense sound, and noble profile, fits the Lisztian mold. He is among the few international pianists who can fill a hall the size of Carnegie, almost regardless of the program. And yet Pollini is also decidedly un-Lisztian. From Clara Schumann, in the nineteenth century, to the present, there has been a

The concert series Pollini curated for Carnegie Hall is intended to combat conservative musical tastes. Photograph by Andre Rival.

parallel tradition of pianists who are not "personalities." These musicians—they include Artur Schnabel, Myra Hess, Dinu Lipatti, Wilhelm Kempff, and Radu Lupu—create the impression that they are acting less as interpreters of the music than as mediums through which the voice of the composer speaks. Nobody among today's pianists is a greater master of this illusion than Pollini. A week before the Debussy/Boulez recital, in a concert with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Boulez, he played an unsettling new piano concerto entitled "Recitativo Oscuro," by the Italian composer Salvatore Sciarrino, which held the audience in thrall. "The performance would not have been the same without Pollini," Boulez said afterward. "You felt the force of his character and his intelligence even when he was not playing. Pollini is a very modest man who becomes a tremendous personality at the piano, but his commitment is always to the music, not to himself."

Pollini has been one of the most sought-after concert artists in the world for many years, yet he is without showmanship. There are none of the darkened-hall and single-light atmospherics that turned Sviatoslav Richter's recitals into religious services; none of the look-ma-no-hands shrugging with which Horowitz used to get a laugh during his bows. Pollini has avoided the cult of personality to such a degree that when I asked a veteran of more than thirty years of Pollini recitals what he knew about the pianist, all he could tell me was "Only what I know from program bios—that he's Milanese, that his father was one of Italy's important modern architects, and that he won first prize in the Chopin Competition when



"Did you do that to be hurtful?"

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he was only eighteen. But when you make music like that does it really matter who you are?"

Last fall, Pollini invited me to visit him in Milan. The apartment where he and his wife, Marilisa, live is a five-minute walk from the Duomo, in the heart of the old city. It is on the first floor in the back of an eighteenth-century palazzo, the courtyard of which is accessible through a tiny doorway that obliges you to bend almost double to avoid bumping your head. The Pollinis' high-ceilinged apartment is filled with modern sculpture and drawings, architectural photographs, art books and exhibition catalogues. The photographs are of buildings designed by the pianist's father, Gino Pollini, and his partner, Luigi Figini, who were founders of the modernist architectural movement known as Gruppo 7—the Italian branch of the schools of Le Corbusier and Gropius. The sculptures, which look like Klee drawings in space, are by Pollini's uncle, Fausto Melotti, a celebrated first-generation Italian abstractionist who died in 1986. As a young man, Melotti had been a serious piano student, and his sculpture shows obvious affinities with musical ideas of rhythm and counterpoint.

I wondered about the effect of this artistic legacy on Pollini's approach to music, but when I brought up the subject he denied—in imperfect English—having been influenced directly by either his father or his uncle. Pollini tends to be cursory about biographical questions of any sort—not out of self-protection, it seems, but simply because such matters are of little interest to him. He is a gracious but careful man, attentive but also a little preoccupied, as if he weren't completely himself away from music.

Pollini's hands are long and slim, and they reminded me of the rather outsized hands of Michelangelo's "David"—permanently ready for use. His voice is soft, and darkened, perhaps by the unfiltered Pall Malls he smokes steadily. Pianists often say that what they are trying to do with their essentially percussive instrument is to imitate the human voice. If Pollini were a singer, he would be a bass. "The most encouraging thing about my childhood," he said to me, finally, "was that I was raised in a family that was open to all the arts, particularly to music and the figurative arts." And, indeed, Pollini is a highly cultivated man. "He grew up in a household where questions of artistic form, how art gets made, were constantly discussed," Marilisa Pollini, an outgoing, attractive woman, said. "Today, his favorite pastime, when he's not involved with music, is to visit museums. In New York, he spends a lot of time at the Met and the Museum of Modern Art."

Several years ago, Pollini was asked by Judith Arron, the late artistic director of Carnegie Hall, to mark the millennium by devising a series of programs that would span the evolution of Western music. The concerts began last October, and will run until March of next year—twenty-seven programs that range from Greek chant to the music of today, and feature, along with Pollini, some of the world's top orchestras, chamber groups, and singers. The series, which is called "Perspectives: Maurizio Pollini," is quite pointedly conceived. It is intended as a corrective to the sort of conservatism in musical taste expressed, for instance, in a little book, "The Agony of Modern Music," written by the musicologist Henry Pleasants in 1955. "Serious music is a dead art," Pleasants declared. "The vein which for three hundred years offered a seemingly inexhaustible yield of beautiful music has run out. What we know as modern music is the noise made by deluded speculators picking through the slagpile." Pleasants' diatribe was taken very seriously forty-five years ago, and, while it would probably go largely unnoticed today, his sentiments live on in the not insignificant number of people who left at intermission at the concert last week, before Pollini played the Boulez.

Pollini's grand tour makes the strongest possible argument for modern music. In an essay in the Carnegie Hall program book, he quotes the composer whose most audacious works for the piano, the "Hammerklavier" and the "Diabelli Variations," open and close the series. "The world," Beethoven wrote in one of his notebooks, "is a king; it wants to be flattered if it's to bestow favor—but true art is obstinate, doesn't let itself get forced into flattering forms." Pollini adds, "The composers whom I consider to be the most important representatives of the second half of the twentieth century are characterized by the same intransigence in their choice of language." He writes that he is particularly interested in "works of special significance in the evolution of musical language." To that end, he is featuring pieces by such Renaissance and Baroque intransigents as Josquin Desprez, Palestrina, Gesualdo, and Monteverdi, as well as pathbreaking music by Mozart, Chopin, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Debussy.

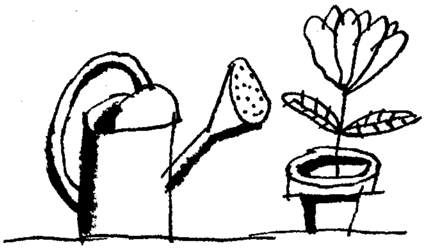
In recent years, works by the first generation of atonalists—Schoenberg and his pupils Berg and Webern—have found a place on mainstream recital and orchestral programs. But, with what might seem supreme indifference to the box office, Pollini has included in nearly every program of the "Perspectives" series at least one piece by the even more intimidating postwar modernists; among them, in addition to Boulez, are Milton Babbitt, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Elliott Carter, György Ligeti, Messiaen, Luigi Nono, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and Iannis Xenakis. He has also programmed four new works by contemporary composers, which he helped commission with the award money he received several years ago when he won Germany's prestigious Siemens International Music Prize.

Music, Pollini told me, was "immediately important" to him. He was born in Milan in 1942, and both of his parents, who were from Rovereto, in the Trentino, were music lovers; his father studied the violin, and his mother studied piano and voice. As a boy, he began to build on his parents' record collection of 78s and early LPs. Among the first recordings he acquired were performances by Toscanini of Beethoven's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, and the Busch Quartet playing the composer's late, challenging Opus 131 and 132 string quartets. At the age of six, he began piano lessons, and it was fortunate, he said, that his first teacher, Carlo Lonati, encouraged him not to limit himself to the usual beginner's diet of Bach Inventions and the simpler Haydn and Mozart pieces. "After a reasonable time," Pollini said, "he wanted me to have contact with many difficult works, even though it was very early for me—pieces by Beethoven, Schumann, and Chopin." Pollini said that he never felt shy about his interest in music, and that, as a boy, he loved playing the piano for friends. "When Pollini was quite young," recalls Riccardo Chailly, who was another Milanese wunderkind, and is now the conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, "he was caught by a teacher reading something under his desk during a lesson. The teacher asked him to show the class what it was, and it turned out to be Bach's St. Matthew Passion."

Milan was Italy's most cosmopolitan city in the postwar years, and Pollini was taken to hear many of the century's great pianists. "I heard them all—Rubinstein, Gieseking, Cortot, Backhaus, Michelangeli, Clara Haskil, Edwin Fischer," he said. "The only great ones who didn't come were Horowitz and Schnabel. I was particularly attracted to Rubinstein because of his incredible cantabile playing of Chopin." Until the age of thirteen, Pollini went to a regular school. By then, he had become so caught up in music that he finished his education with private tutors. He took lessons from the well-known pianist Carlo Vidusso—with whom he played poker—and he attended the Milan Conservatory, where he studied conducting. When he was sixteen, he shared second prize in the piano competition in Geneva. But he is horrified at the suggestion that he was a prodigy. "It was easy for me to play and to sight-read and to memorize," he said. "I was a young man with a lot of facility. But, of course, technique by itself doesn't mean anything. The challenge is how to connect technique to sound—that has been my life's work."

His wife, whom he has known since childhood, when she was also a serious piano student, remembers things differently. "Maurizio was most decidedly a prodigy," Marilisa said, "but his parents didn't raise him as one. He is a combination of both of them. His mother was very artistic and very sensitive. His father was calm, lucid, very well balanced and well grounded. They were both reserved. Maurizio's emotional side comes, I think, from Melotti."

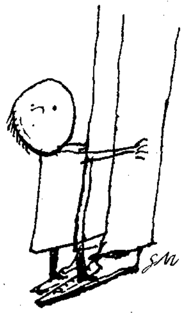
In 1960, Pollini entered the Chopin Competition in Warsaw—and, at eighteen, became the youngest winner in the competition's history. His idol, Rubinstein, was the chairman of the jury, and, afterward, the great pianist delivered a much quoted assessment of the prizewinner: "The boy already plays technically better than the rest of us." Pollini said that Rubinstein put a hand on his shoulder and gave him a piece of advice that he has never forgotten: "He said, 'All my life I have never been tired after a concert because I have always played with only the weight of the arm.' What he was telling me was that this was the most natural way to obtain the biggest and the most beautiful sound at the same time."



Pollini's keyboard manner is notable for its apparent lack of strain. Sometimes, during passages of particular intensity, he rises slightly from the piano bench and doesn't so much strike the keys as press into them with the full force of his arms. At such moments, the sound he gets—and it can be extremely soft as well as extremely loud—seems to emanate from the deepest part of the instrument. Friends of his tell me that, for all the slightness of his appearance, he has immensely powerful shoulders, built up from years of swimming. Although Pollini occasionally uses a pool in Milan, he reserves most of his serious swimming for vacations on the Mediterranean, in the Caribbean, or in the South Seas. ("A pool is not so beautiful," he says.) When he was younger, he loved driving Alfa Romeos, but in 1975 his back was injured in an automobile accident. A metal disk was implanted in the base of his neck. Marilisa told me that, to everyone's astonishment, Pollini was playing the piano a week after the operation, and that he has never referred to the accident since.

After the Warsaw competition, Pollini made his first recording—Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E Minor, with Paul Kletzki conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra, on EMI. As heard on the second of two volumes devoted to Pollini in the "Great Pianists of the Twentieth Century" series, on Philips, it is a performance that remains stunning for its poetic feeling, its clarity and sweep. Rubinstein told the impresario Sol Hurok about him, but Pollini turned down Hurok's offer of a big North American tour. "People could not understand how someone so young could have the foresight to make that kind of decision," Marilisa said. "But Maurizio simply felt that he needed more time to grow up in order to face the pressures of an international career." There were rumors of a nervous breakdown, but Marilisa says that nothing of the sort occurred. Pollini told me that, after Warsaw, he simply needed time for "study."

The Pollinis were married in 1968. "Milan in the fifties and sixties was a wonderful place culturally," Marilisa said. "Artists are products of their time, and that period had a very important influence on Maurizio. When we were young, we would go with his friend Claudio Abbado to everything—Giorgio Strehler productions of Goldoni and Shakespeare, Visconti productions at La Scala, Antonioni and Fellini films. We still go to everything." When I asked her why she had abandoned a possible concert career of her own, she laughed and said, "When you are around a pianist like Maurizio, what is the point?" One night in Milan, when I was having dinner in the Pollinis' kitchen, I asked him whether he had ever heard his wife play. Pollini looked taken aback, then he said, "No—I never have." Surprised by his answer, I said, "Did you ever ask to hear her play?" Pollini blushed slightly. "Yes," he replied, "but she declined."



From the beginning of Pollini's career, Marilisa has accompanied him on all his tours—even after their son, Daniele, was born, in 1978. Laurence Tucker, who was one of Pollini's American managers during the nineteen-eighties and nineties, told me that before Daniele was old enough to be left on his own the Pollinis always travelled as a family. "Marilisa made sure that the boy did his schoolwork in the hotel rooms," Tucker said. "Often when I'd stop by for a meeting with Pollini, Daniele would be on his father's lap." Daniele is now a piano student at the Accademia Pianistica, in Imola. When I asked Pollini about his son's progress, he said that the young man was undecided about whether to become a concert pianist or a composer—or both. He added, with fatherly pride, "He is completely at home in the music of today."

Pollini's New York career was launched, belatedly, in 1968, by Ronald Wilford, the president of Columbia Artists Management, who had been sent tapes of his playing by the head of EMI's classical division in London, Peter Andry. Wilford went to Milan to meet Pollini. "I knew at once that he was the real thing," Wilford told me. "He was an unpretentious guy who wasn't filled with himself, and who was passionate about his art." For Pollini's New York début that year, Wilford booked him into the relatively modest venue of Hunter College's Assembly Hall. The concert, the *Times* critic Allen Hughes wrote, made a "splendid impression," but the following year, when Pollini was a soloist with the New York Philharmonic, he got ambushed by the paper's senior music critic, Harold Schonberg. Assessing Pollini's performance of the Chopin concerto, Schonberg wrote that Pollini "went through the Chopin E minor like a competition winner. That is, there were no egocentricities to ruffle the pedants, no great splashes of temperament, no deviation in rhythm. Everything was neat, lucid, well-oiled technically, musicianly and a little boring. Of daring, color, organization of the bass line and spontaneity, there was very little. This is the modern, nice-Nelly way to play Chopin, and it is wrong." To a listener who has only the earlier EMI recording of the work to go by, Schonberg's review seems willfully off target.

Despite Schonberg's reservations, Pollini, by the mid-seventies, was selling out both Carnegie and Avery Fisher Halls. He had joined that select group of visitors to New York—among them Alfred Brendel and the singers Janet Baker and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau—whose audiences were not only inveterate concertgoers but people from the art world and the literary élite. Pollini had also become an international recording star for Deutsche Grammophon, which gave him carte blanche to record whatever he wanted. His recording choices marked him, almost immediately, as an uncommon artist, who brought the same depth of understanding to Schoenberg, Debussy, Berg, Webern, and Boulez that he did to Schubert, Chopin, Schumann, and Liszt. "It was these recordings," Wilford says, "that made Pollini hot."

For all Pollini's outward reserve, his performance style was riveting in its intensity—implosive, rather than explosive. Laurence Tucker, who is now the general manager of the Seattle Symphony, recalls that he used to stand backstage with Pollini at Carnegie Hall: "Before the concert, he would pace up and down, smoking cigarettes and drinking one espresso after another. His concentration on what he was about to do was so total that you couldn't say a word to him. Everything was about the music. Everything went into making the concert an event."

Pollini's preparation bordered on the obsessive. Franz Mohr, his longtime piano tuner in New York, told me, "Pollini brings a Hamburg Steinway from Europe, and before a performance he spends a lot of time moving it around onstage to get the kind of projection he wants for the audience. He'll jump into the auditorium and ask me to play something—usually the first piece of Schumann's 'Kinderszenen'—so he can hear how it sounds in the hall."

At last summer's music festival in Salzburg, Pollini organized a kind of mini-preview of his New York series—seven concerts that featured many of the same pieces. Several days before the first concert, he arrived in a rehearsal hall to listen to the opening work, a Renaissance Mass entitled "Missa Prolationum," by the fifteenth-century Franco-Flemish composer Johannes Ockeghem. The singers were the members of one of Europe's most distinguished choral groups, the Arnold Schoenberg Chorus of Vienna, conducted by Erwin Ortner. As Ortner took his singers through the piece, he was repeatedly stopped by Pollini, who pointed out that one or more of the notes being sung did not correspond with what he was reading in his score. Each time, after a low-voiced discussion between the two men, Ortner instructed his singers to make the changes Pollini wanted.

It was astonishing to watch one of Europe's most respected choral conducters being corrected, however politely, by a musician who is hardly known as an expert in Renaissance music. Later, when I asked the festival's director of concerts, Hans Landesmann, about the rehearsal, he told me that Pollini had discovered an edition of the Ockeghem score that was different from the one in Ortner's possession, and that he had made more than a hundred corrections. "Ortner was quite upset," Landesmann said, "but he accepted the changes because of his immense respect for Pollini." When I asked Pollini about this display of musical one-upmanship, he looked embarrassed, muttered something about the fact that his edition was "not necessarily more authentic but better realized" than Ortner's, and quickly changed the subject.

Pollini's Salzburg programs were given in the city's venerable music academy, the Mozarteum, and, in contrast to the showy crowds that thronged the main festival halls, the people at his opening concert were mostly score-carrying students and music lovers who had come simply to listen. At first glance, the program seemed a hodgepodge: the Ockeghem Mass; then the world première of "Trame d'Ombre," a "concert madrigal" for chorus and instruments based on a Japanese No drama, by the contemporary Italian composer Giacomo Manzoni; and, finally, the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, played by Pollini. But the underlying unity of the program was soon evident. What we were hearing was a lesson in how monumentality can be achieved from music's basic elements—from the cathedral-building interplay of Ockeghem's canons, through the eerie scene-painting of the Manzoni, to Beethoven's epic dissolution of the classical style. The Ockeghem Mass, firmly but innovatively grounded in the basic principles of Western polyphony, seemed to give Manzoni permission to bend the old rules to new, exotic purposes. Beethoven's achievement seemed more than ever a summing up of all that had come before, and a foreshadowing of the modernist harmonic meltdown.

In a rented villa outside of Salzburg a few nights after the opening concert, Pollini talked to me about some of his curatorial choices. He noted that his interest in "compressed intensity" had prompted him to create a program around musical "aphorisms"—"novels in a sigh," he said—in a program that juxtaposed Beethoven's miniaturist Bagatelles with Schoenberg's brief Opus 19 piano pieces, Chopin's Preludes, and several chamber works. He cited the enduring power of monody, as demonstrated in a program mixing Greek chant with solo pieces for voice and for oboe from Berio's "Sequenza," and madrigals by Monteverdi. And he made an illuminating comparison between Brahms's Intermezzo in E Minor, Opus 116, No. 5, with its cross-hatching of melodic material between the right and left hands, and Webern's handling of melody in the atonal Variations, Opus 27, which were written nearly a half century later. "What is interesting," Pollini said, "is how daring and new Brahms's conception is, and how expressive the Webern is." In other words, he was saying, Webern was the melodic purist; and Brahms—whom Wagner's followers railed against as a reactionary—was the radical. By way of illustration, Pollini went over to a Steinway and played a few examples—with concert-level power. Then he smiled and said that we were dealing with "a great mystery—how the inspiration of the composer can transcend the difficulty he sets for himself."

Pollini's second Salzburg program offered a variation on the architectural lesson of the first—the object, in this case, being to show how a simple, fixed sequence of notes could provide the foundation for an edifice of great complexity. Again, an innovator of the Renaissance set the stage—a Mass, by the Franco-Flemish master Josquin Desprez, that transformed a popular war tune of the day, "L'Homme Armé," into a spiralling hymn of praise. The next piece jumped five hundred years, to a new "choral" work for instruments by the contemporary Italian composer Franco Donatoni. It was little more than a noisy joke about the perils of musical arrival, a gradual piling up of instrumental "choirs" whose failure to come together until the very end was anticipated by the work's humorous title—"Poll."

Completion, of a kind, was provided by a step backward—Arnold Schoenberg's Five Pieces, Opus 23, for piano, written in 1923. It was in these miniatures that Schoenberg fully embraced his twelve-tone system. An early listener to Schoenberg, the American critic Paul Rosenfeld, wrote that the composer's works "baffle with their apparently willful ugliness, and bewilder with their geometric cruelty and coldness." Pollini's playing of Opus 23 was warm and unbaffling. He has long been a Schoenberg champion—his 1975 recording of the complete piano works stands as the definitive reading of these influential pieces—and in Salzburg he made it

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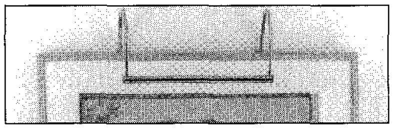

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clear that, if the composer is ever to capture the hearts of the general public, what is needed is fewer declarations about Schoenberg's revolutionary radicalism and more clearheaded declarations of love.

Finally, as if to show that there was really nothing new in the march toward modernism, Pollini ended the program with Schumann's seldom-played "Concerto Without Orchestra," which was written in 1836, when the composer was painfully separated from his wife-in-waiting, Clara. Listening to Pollini's panoramic, unsentimental approach to this extravaganza, I was reminded of what the pianist Emanuel Ax said about him: "He is not someone you can take apart and say that he plays a particular passage with special brilliance, although he does. You've got to listen to the whole performance—to hear how one thing relates to the other. When you give the guy the chance to take you on a complete journey, that's when you say, 'Wow!' "

Pollini has been criticized for approaching diverse composers in much the same way, using his technique and organizational powers to suppress, for example, the sense of struggle and revelation that has traditionally been associated with the nineteenth-century Romantic repertoire. But most important pianists—from Rachmaninoff to Martha Argerich—could be accused of putting an unmistakable personal stamp on everything they do. Pollini—unlike, say, Horowitz or Richter—doesn't bring attention to his "interpretation" by lingering unduly over a nuance or teasing out an inner voice to catch you by surprise. He has a scholar's knowledge of each of the composers he plays, but he is, at heart, a modernist. One reason that some listeners may find his playing too "objective" is that his use of color never seems laid on for effect. His expressiveness arises organically out of the structural dictates of the music. "You hear complaints about Pollini from other pianists," Ax says, "because, although a lot of them are well trained as musicians, they are not well trained as listeners. With a pianist on Pollini's level, you owe it to yourself to go for what he gives, not for what you want him to give."

Pollini is fascinated by "Chopin's perfection of form, by the way he makes every note count for something," and his balancing of the music's glamorous surface with its emotionally restless interior makes the best case since Rubinstein for Chopin as a master who never really belonged in the salon. Reviewers have sometimes complained that Pollini has a tendency to speed everything up, and, indeed, on his new recording of Chopin's Ballades, the Fourth Ballade is a full minute shorter (nine minutes and fifty-five seconds) than those of two other noted contemporary Chopinists, Krystian Zimerman and Evgeny Kissin. While Kissin tends to italicize every new shift of feeling, and Zimerman seems to wander in a nostalgic haze, Pollini leads the listener inexorably through the narrative. Pollini said to me that the Fourth Ballade is a doorway into Chopin's final, most formally inventive period, and his reading of it acknowledges that.

Pollini's recordings of Beethoven sonatas are tightly structured and sometimes pushed to limits of legibility in their speed, yet they are always solidly grounded. His Debussy Preludes and Études match the highest standard of French "impressionist" playing—that of Walter Gieseking—in their atmospheric subtlety. And he is without peer in the twentieth-century works that are featured on two of his most celebrated recordings of the seventies: the pairing, in 1972, of Stravinsky's Three Movements from "Pétrouchka," and Prokofiev's wartime Seventh Sonata; and his 1978 coupling of Webern's Variations for Piano with the Boulez Second Sonata. What Harold Schonberg detected as a certain hardness in his playing as a young man is nowhere evident in his spacious recent recordings of the Brahms concertos with Abbado and the Berlin Philharmonic. What you hear in them is a quality that Riccardo Chailly observed when Pollini was a soloist with the Concertgebouw Orchestra: "My musicians always say about Pollini, 'We are with another orchestra, not a pianist.' "

Pollini's performances feel thoroughly lived. When I asked him to describe the point where he arrives at an interpretation of the music, he said, "It's a continuous process that never ends. I go back and play the same composers, the same works, all the time, and although the big line may stay the same, there are always little changes. When I return to a piece that I have played many times before, I try to remember all of my previous experiences with it. That memory becomes the point of departure for approaching it again. I can do this without practicing. I carry a certain image of the music with me and many times I just let the sound play in my head."

"Can you go through, say, a whole forty-minute piece just by thinking about it?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

One evening in Milan, the Pollinis had several close friends to dinner, among them the architect Gae Aulenti, and a well-known Milanese lawyer and art collector, Guido Rossi. Pollini was quiet but attentive to every turn in the conversation. He was droll about his passion for the music of Schoenberg: "I didn't think so much about putting Schoenberg on the Carnegie programs; he just made his way in." And he smiled obligingly when Rossi said that smoking was a "feminine" habit and that Pall Malls, in particular, were "for women."

Later, I asked Gae Aulenti what she found remarkable about Pollini. "The depth of his involvement in what interests him," she said. "Twenty years ago, we worked together on a new production in Pesaro of Rossini's 'La Donna del Lago.' I was the stage designer, and he was the conductor. During one of the rehearsals, the walls of the set started to cave in. I yelled, 'Maurizio! Maurizio!' but he was so buried in the music that he didn't notice what was happening."

I was curious about what Pollini might be engaged with when he was away from the piano, and one afternoon I asked him what books he was reading for pleasure. "Bach's cantatas," he said. He took me into his study, and there, strewn over two concert-grand Steinways, were the scores of what looked to be all two hundred and twenty-five extant cantatas, written, more than two and a half centuries ago, to mark events in the Lutheran liturgical calendar and special secular occasions. Each of them has a "different character, a different atmosphere," Pollini said, as though he were talking about a great painting, play, or novel. "Each of them has a world of its own." ♦

BOOKS

THE MAN IN BED

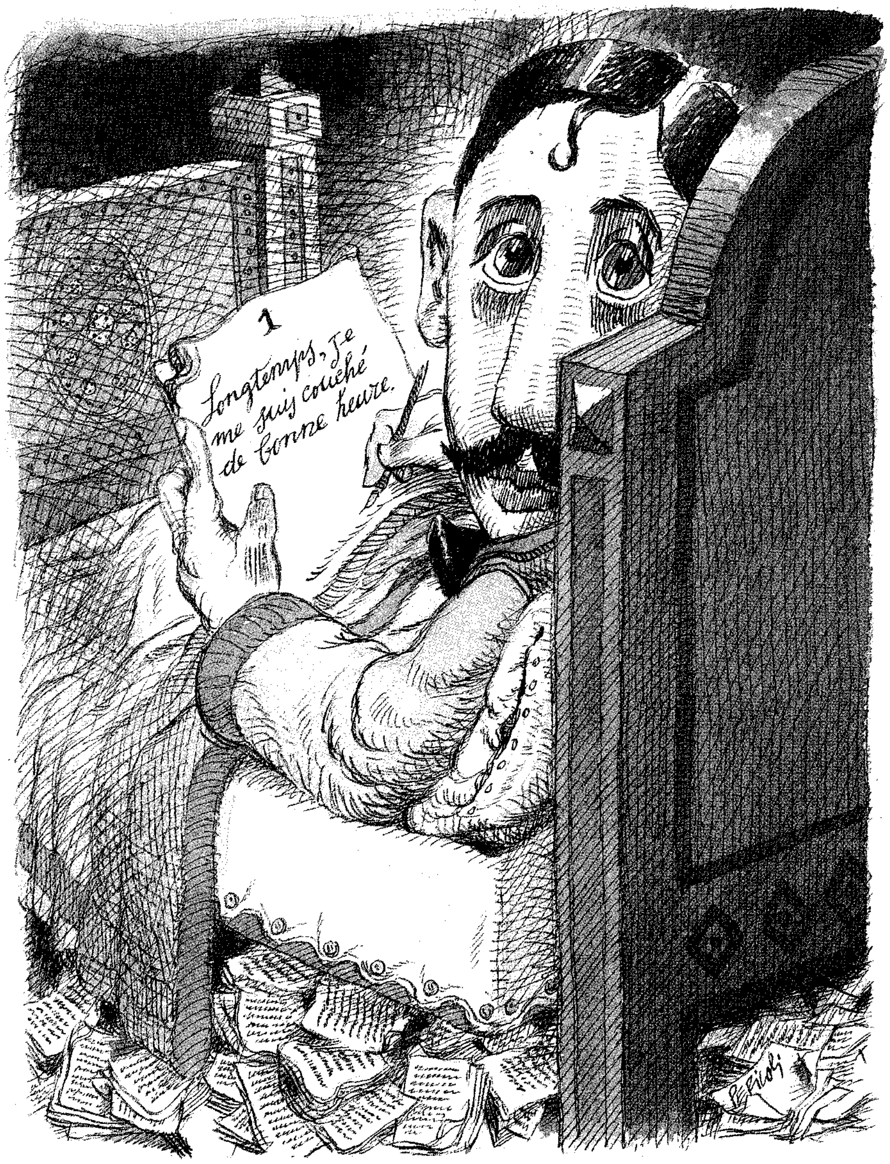
A new biography of marvellous, semi-moribund Marcel.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

Proust is now as far from us in time as the early Romantics were from the generation of Shaw and Wells. Yet he continues to be loved; his work has not petrified into the intimidating mesas, the scarcely scalable volcanic cones, which time and lessening literacy have made of Joyce, Musil, Mann, and even Kafka, who left his more ambitious works uncompleted. These vintage modernists, so bold and fresh in their lifetimes, have taken on the nature of assignments, to be worked through as the classic Greek and Latin texts were for earlier generations of the educated. But Proust remains as light and inviting as a feather bed, a nearly infinite mass of prose gently sighing up and down, like a calm sea glinting with myriad coins of moonlight. A young correspondent of mine wrote that he had just begun to read Proust; he likened it to a first date, and said it made him feel shy. The novelist Mary Gordon, I recently read, begins her writing day by reading ten pages of Proust, somewhat the way Karl Barth used to play a Mozart recording before settling to theology. While we may have trouble remembering where we were when we first opened "Ulysses" or "The Castle," most of us can recall when we first began to read "Remembrance of Things Past."

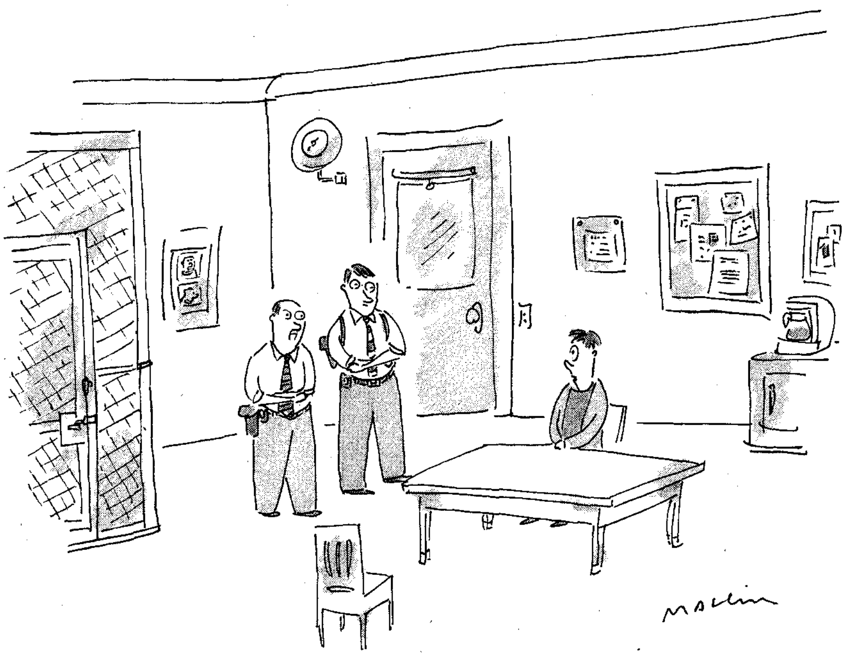
The title, lifted from a Shakespeare sonnet and bestowed upon "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" by Proust's first English translator, C. K. Scott Moncrieff, met protest at the outset and is under definitive attack now; the 1993 Modern Library translation—Scott Moncrieff's as amended by first Terence Kilmartin and then D. J. Enright—is bluntly titled "In Search of Lost Time." The Proust lover's heart rather falls; Scott Moncrieff's ornate and sinuous English prose, based upon the first, highly faulty French texts, was the gate that opened into Proust's incomparable gardens, and one resents any alteration to sites of enchantment. After years of rumors that the poet Richard Howard would be doing a retranslation, word arrives that a new translation is under way for Penguin, a committee job (like the King James Bible) under the editorship of Christopher Prendergast; may it be less wooden, less purged of period flavor and what we might call "swing" than are the modern replacements of Constance Garnett's translations from the Russian. Scott Moncrieff's was a labor of love, and Proust has attracted other such labors in the form of precious small books of devotion (by Samuel Beckett, François Mauriac, Roger Shattuck, Howard Moss, Alain de Botton) and a splendidly Proustian two-volume biography by the English scholar George D. Painter. Now a new biography, "Marcel Proust: A Life," by an American professor of French at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, William C. Carter, has been published by Yale ($35)—a formidable volume of more than nine hundred pages, adorned by two generous sheafs of photographs and a striking jacket featuring the rather Draculaesque oil portrait by Jacques-Émile Blanche of the young Proust dressed to kill.

Carter explains in a preface why a new biography is "overdue": a "wealth of



Proust's life, unlike that of many other writers, makes a good story, none the worse for the subject's having already told it, in his own way, in his masterwork.

TULLIO PERICOLI



"Before we begin, may I ask which of you is the good cop, and which is the bad?"

• •

fresh material" has become available since the publication of Painter's second volume, in 1965. More than five thousand letters have been published in Philip Kolb's twenty-one-volume edition of Proust's correspondence; seventy-five of the notebooks in which Proust composed are available in the Bibliothèque Nationale; a number of sketches and poems by the adolescent author have turned up; and French editors busily reëdited and annotated, for the 1989 four-volume Pléiade edition, the notoriously dishevelled, compulsively revised text of "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu," the last third of which was posthumously printed. There is no doubting that some new material exists; but also there is no gainsaying that Carter is not the writer Painter was. Painter's pages are saturated with the Proustian perfumes; his factual account—a pioneering work, in that, he claimed, "the subject has never yet been treated with anything approaching scholarly method"—follows the mythologizing scheme of Proust's fictional opus to the point where both the biography and the novel end with the word "Time." Painter's text abounds with beautifully phrased metaphors, epigrams, and psychologizing. For instance, the moot matter of Proust's asthma:

> In his attacks of asthma the same causes were at work as in his childhood fits of hysterical weeping; his unconscious mind was asking for his father's pity and his mother's love; and his breathlessness reproduced, perhaps, the moment of suffocation which comes equally from tears or from sexual pleasure. He sinned through his lungs, and in the end his lungs were to kill him. Other great writers, Flaubert and Dostoevsky, suffered from epilepsy, which stood in an inseparable and partly causal relation to their art. Asthma was Proust's epilepsy. In early years it was the marking of his difference from others, his appeal for love, his refuge from duties which were foreign to his still unconscious purpose; and in later life it helped him to withdraw from the world and to produce a work "de si longue haleine." Meanwhile, however, he was only a little boy choking and writhing in the scented air under the green leaves, in the deadly garden of spring.

Carter, on the other hand, writes with little flair and occasional lameness. On Proust's boyhood, he writes as if for children:

> To show their displeasure and to indicate to Marcel that he was unwanted, [his schoolmates] would speak to him sharply or feign a shove, dismissing him rudely with a wave of the arm, causing his large, dark eyes to fill with sadness.

Without any source citation, we are told, "Sometimes he felt so lonely and desperate when his mother left him at night that he identified himself with the wretched man abandoned by his own father and nailed to the cross." When Proust ventures out into high society, Carter writes as if for the society page:

> Many of the ladies carried parasols to shield their delicate, ivory skin from the sun, while the gentlemen wore their best top hats. There were titled ladies and gentlemen galore, including the countesses Greffuhle, Fitz-James, Pourtalès, and Potocka, the princesses de Brancovan and de Chimay, and Comte Boni de Castellane. The poet José-Maria de Heredia and his three ravishing daughters were there.

Painter refers to the great novel as "À la Recherche," and Carter favors "Search," which sounds like a computer command. Though Painter's biography feels more spacious and leisurely, it is in fact the shorter, its two volumes totalling, without end matter, seven hundred pages, as against Carter's eight hundred and ten bigger pages of text.

Carter gives us a solid Proust—a man who stood five feet six, not only endured but enjoyed his year in the military, fought a duel (showing, a friend noted, "a sang-froid and firmness that appear incompatible with his nerves"), played tennis and the piano, passed his law exams, and earned an advanced degree in philosophy. This new biography gains interest and density as it follows the delicate child, carried in his mother's womb during the hardships and hazards of the 1870-71 Prussian siege of Paris, through a pampered childhood and self-indulgent youth into the bedridden, drug-raddled adulthood that produced a heroically long and intricate masterpiece. It is an inspiring story—a life justified in the majestic retelling of that life, in a novel whose climax is the vision of itself, as its hero arrives at the blessed condition of an author. If Carter's method is pedestrian, his mighty subject flies: the life ends with a quote (from "Search," if you must) evoking those fictional artists (Elstir, Vinteuil) in whose company we "do really fly from star to star."

Though Painter by no means neglected the evolution of "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu," I don't remember from his pages quite the sense of possessed, self-ruinous authorial activity that Carter's last chapters describe. The typesetting of the vast novel in its successive volumes was, like that of Joyce's "Ulysses," a printer's nightmare—"one of the most demanding productions in the history of publishing." Huge amounts of lead involved in the setting were immobilized while the author and publisher fumed and quarrelled. The workers, who composed on monotype, began "to refuse copy that was too difficult to read because they were paid per thousand letters. The time they spent trying to decipher Proust's handwriting lowered their wages considerably." Using a method invented by his beloved housekeeper, Céleste Albaret, Proust amended and augmented his manuscripts and proofs with scribbled "paste-ons," or *paperoles*, of which one, when unfolded, "measured one and a half meters." As he wrote into dawn by the light of his green-shaded bedside lamp, his eyes began to ache and weaken. His solution to the problem was typically impractical and extravagant: rather than undertake a daylight visit to an optometrist, he had Céleste go out and buy him a dozen pairs of steel-rimmed spectacles, then he "chose a few that improved his vision and told Céleste to keep them all." In the fall of 1922, as he was dying of pneumonia, refusing the treatments urged by his doctors (who included his younger brother, Robert) and starving himself on a self-imposed diet of fruit, ice cream, and cold beer brought from the Ritz, Proust labored with his last strength on the typescript of "The Captive," at one point suggesting a cut of two hundred and fifty pages, which was not made, and at another demanding that the presses be stopped, at his expense, so that he could change the ending of an excerpt, "Albertine Sleeping," in the magazine *Nouvelle Revue Française*. On the last night of his life, according to Painter, he wrote insertions in a quavering, scarcely legible hand and called Céleste in to take dictation; he had some refinements to add to the dying of his fictional character Bergotte, "now I'm in the same condition myself."

These feverish revisions carried to the edge of the grave the expansion that Proust imposed on his chef-d'œuvre, as if realizing it was to be his life's achievement and determined therefore to get everything he knew and felt into it. The work grew from what was to be an essay arguing against the critic Sainte-Beuve; it took novelistic form in Proust's mind around 1908 and was offered to a prospective publisher, Alfred Vallette, as a book of about four hundred pages, which would be ready to appear by January or February, 1910. It was bipartite in structure—time lost and time regained. The two ways of the narrator's childhood walks, called Swann's Way and the Guermantes Way, were to be shown, at the end, to join, just as Swann's daughter, Gilberte, marries the Marquis Robert de Saint-Loup, one of the Guermantes. Involuntary memory, whether worked by a madeleine dipped in tea or by uneven paving stones underfoot, recaptured lost time and revealed to the narrator his vocation as a writer.

Thus, in the original scheme Sainte-Beuve's confusion of the creative self and the social self would be banished. In a notebook of 1908 Proust had written that Sainte-Beuve erred in not viewing "literature as a thing apart, or at least detachable from the rest of the man and his nature," and in ignoring "what a very slight degree of self-acquaintance teaches us: that a book is the product of a different self from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices." Proust, unhappy with his outer self, which had disappointed his parents and accomplished little in the world, insisted on the existence of a better, creative, hidden self. Homosexuality had been from the start part of Proust's narrative, even when its provisional title was "Contre Sainte-Beuve"—"a genuine novel," he wrote Vallette in 1909, "and an extremely indecent one in places." As he worked, the project grew under him. By 1912, "Swann's Way," the first installment, would make "a single volume of 800 or 900 pages," he wrote a friend and early consultant, Georges de Lauris. On Christmas Eve of that year, two publishers simultaneously rejected "Swann's Way," including, on the advice of André Gide, the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Proust, whose fortune after his parents' deaths totalled the equivalent of $4.6 million, decided to publish the book at his own expense. Once it appeared, on November 14, 1913, under the imprint of Bernard Grasset, "Proust would never again," as Carter ringingly puts it, "have to justify his enterprise or go begging for a publisher." He prepared the typescript of what he imagined as the second volume, "The Guermantes Way," and began to receive proofs from his new publisher, the *NRF*, where Gide had performed a penitent about-face.

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gust of 1914, the First World War commenced, and, a few months earlier, Alfred Agostinelli, a twenty-five-year-old Monacan chauffeur and secretary of Proust's, drowned off Antibes in the course of flying lessons. Proust had loved Agostinelli (who had a common-law wife), and he lavished his grief on a monstrous expansion of the sections of the novel concerning Albertine, a love of the narrator's for whom Proust already had a plan: "In the second part of the novel the girl will be financially ruined and I will support her without attempting to possess her because I am incapable of happiness." In the revised novel, Albertine, after being, like Agostinelli with Proust, a captive of and then a fugitive from the narrator, dies. The war having halted publication, Proust had the time as well as the passion to expand his novel from a half million words to more than a million and a quarter between the years 1914 and 1922.

Whether or not the total work, thus inflated, should be considered a casualty of the war depends on the reader's appetite for Proust's delicacies. Another early reader and adviser, Louis de Robert, privy to Grasset's worries over the first volume's length, told the author, "Don't cut anything—it would be a crime. Everything must be kept; everything is rare, subtle, profound, true, right, precious, incomparable." When Proust was still an obscure sometime columnist and parodist, the poet Anna de Noailles captured in a phrase the intoxicating compound of his sensibility, the "marvelous mixture of irony and sweetness, like two opposing rivers gliding close to one another." Yet even earnest devotees may feel that, after "The Guermantes Way," the rivers have forgotten how to stop flowing—that a machine at the bottom of the sea keeps grinding out the remorseless news that love is both obsessive and futile, and oblivion is its destination. Carter's biography makes clear upon how narrow a basis of experience Proust's pronouncements on love rested. That he had a keenly affectionate nature is shown by his towering portraits of the narrator's mother and grandmother in his novel, as well as by his avidly flirtatious and rather cloying letters to his friends both male and female. But if he, who told Gide late in his life that he "had never liked women except platonically," ever found a man who loved him in return, the fact has eluded biographers. His friends, when he was still healthy enough for peer friendship, tended to put him off and get married; his beloved pet Agostinelli fled him, while trying to maintain a mercenary connection; some of the waiters Proust so lavishly tipped may have come back to his apartment with him, but his main physical gratification, found in Albert Le Cuziat's male brothel, seems to have been masturbation while watching a hireling of the place masturbate, or, if that failed, after watching famished rats attack each other. This magnificent sensibility dwelt in a poisoned desert. As François Mauriac, in his "Proust's Way," put it:

> The corruption of a life, stagnant though remarkably attentive, defenseless against the outer world, given over entirely to swarming sensations, besieges, penetrates, gnaws and destroys the human beings to whom the novelist had given existence. . . . It remains for us to find ourselves to-day more sensitive than we were in the dazzlement of first reading, to that contamination of a whole romantic world by that morbid creator who bore it too long mingled with his own life, mixed with his deep murkiness, and who communicated to it the germs with which he found himself infected.

Fortunately, the last, relatively short installment, "Time Regained," was conceived along with the magical opening chapters ("Overture," "Combray"). Versions of the beginning and the end were completed as early as 1909. The expanded manuscript, according to testimony from Céleste Albaret and letters to Gaston Gallimard, was apparently complete in 1916. Proust did not live to revise the last sections in proof. His last letter to Gallimard said, in deathbed surrender, "I think now the most urgent action is to deliver all my books to you. The sort of tenacious work that I have done for 'The Captive' . . . forced me to set aside the following volumes." "Le Temps Retrouvé," deciphered by the *NRF* editors from Proust's notebooks, was published in 1927; a Pléiade edition of 1954 contains emendations on almost every page. But, even in mangled and problematical form, the last volume ends the great novel on the same crisp, giddy, and mesmeric note on which it began.

Proust's life, unlike that of many other writers, makes a good story, none the worse for the subject's having already told it, in his own way, in his masterwork. There is a great deal we do not know about "Marcel"—as the narrator is named tentatively, late in the course of "À la Recherche"—that we do know about Proust: his messy finances, his penchant for gambling, his homosexuality (Marcel is neither Jewish nor homosexual, though intensely observant of both minorities), and his literary endeavors. Marcel's father, the novel tells us, has shown a prose poem by his young son to M. de Norpois, who is not impressed, and, volumes later, Marcel sends an article to *Le Figaro*, which, in a still later volume, publishes it; but there is little sense of the continuous literary ambition that Proust in fact displayed. It was a blessing in disguise that his efforts met with small success: "Pleasures and Days," a collection of youthful stories and poems, was much delayed in its publication and, expensively priced, sold a few more than three hundred copies; he accumulated, between 1895 and 1899, close to a thousand pages of a novel, "Jean Santeuil," which he set aside, for the next five years, to work on translating, with the help of his mother and others who knew English, John Ruskin's "Bible of Amiens" and "Sesame and Lilies"; he published, in various Paris magazines, reviews and pastiches and parodies, which attracted considerable favorable attention. His extraordinary gifts were recognized by some, such as Anna de Noailles, Madame Émile Straus, and the *Figaro* editor Gaston Calmette, but in general he was so firmly regarded by the intelligentsia as "the epitome of a bourgeois snob and a dilettante" that Gide rejected the manuscript of "Swann's Way" with barely a glance.

Proust was fortunate that when, approaching the age of forty, he came into his voice and the fullness of his material—the events of his life, regained through the miracle of involuntary memory—the material was virtually untouched by previous exposure. "Jean Santeuil" and "Contre Sainte-Beuve" were unpublished, and all their anticipations of "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" were, like half-forgotten first drafts, available for a truly masterly reworking. It all came down to one book. No wonder it had to be vast. Posterity tends to give novelists a longer ride on one or two big books than on a raft of smaller ones. As Proust, dying at fifty-one, approached the end of his curious martyrdom—an adult life spent mostly in bed, seeing, he complained in a letter, "only the awful walls of this room, never illuminated by daylight"—he divined, let us hope, how long a ride lay ahead. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century, *by Christine Stansell (Metropolitan; $30).* For most of the twentieth century, hard-core Greenwich Villagers looked back on the period from the eighteen-nineties to the nineteen-twenties as their golden age. Stansell shows why: she senses the time and place through its own eyes, ears, and fingertips. In the jumbled downtown streets, cosmopolitan Europeans and the dreamy children of Main Street America flowed together in a stream of avant-garde literature and art, political rebellion, and personal experimentation, creating a cocktail whose intoxicating effects spread far and wide. What Villagers did, mostly, was talk; Stansell beautifully captures the tone and texture of their conversation—so exuberant that its traces can be felt to this day.

Patrick O'Brian: A Life Revealed, *by Dean King (Holt; $27.50).* This is exactly the sort of literary biography that O'Brian, the author of the celebrated Aubrey/Maturin naval novels, hoped to avoid. Reluctant to provide facts about himself, and often untruthful when he did so, O'Brian (who died earlier this year) had much in his past that he wanted buried. He walked away from his first marriage, changed his name from Russ to O'Brian, and pretended Anglo-Irish ancestry. King's diligent research yields pleasing details: for instance, the unfortunate hot-air balloonist in "The Letter of Marque" bears the name of an unsupportive book editor. O'Brian addicts will be grateful for King's efforts, but those seeking an explanation of the writer's powerful hold on his readers will not find it here.

The Operator, *by Tom King (Random House; $25.95).* What are we to make of a longtime *Wall Street Journal* reporter who claims to find it remarkable that a billionaire mogul could be self-aggrandizing, manipulative, and opportunistic? The extraordinary career of David Geffen—personal manager, record-label owner, co-founder of DreamWorks SKG, and Bill Clinton confidant—has consistently epitomized the pop-culture Zeitgeist, and King does an admirable job of laying out the succession of business deals and behind-the-scenes relationships that helped to put him there. Still, not even the most salacious backstage dish can compensate for his failure to render the complexities of Geffen's character.

Five Sisters: The Langhornes of Virginia, *by James Fox (Simon & Schuster; $30).* Irene Langhorne, the last great Southern belle, moved North in 1895, when she married Charles Dana Gibson, creator of the Gibson girl. In her wake, three younger sisters (her elder, Lizzie, was already married) burst onto the glittering society stage. Nancy, the most famous, married Waldorf Astor and threw herself into English political activism; Phyllis, the author's grandmother, was more introverted; Nora, with "a heart like a hotel," repeatedly led the family to the brink of scandal. Fox brings intimacy to these semi-public personalities, elevating a century's gossip and legend into absorbing history.

Loose Balls: Easy Money, Hard Fouls, Cheap Laughs, and True Love in the N.B.A., *by Jayson Williams, with Steve Friedman (Doubleday; $23.95).* Now that a toe injury has put Williams, the New Jersey Nets center, out of action for the rest of the season, his fans will have to make do with his memoir. Haphazardly organized, the book nonetheless gets by on Williams's irrepressible personality and charm. He is open about his loving but troubled family (both his sisters died of AIDS, and Williams adopted their children), his own indiscretions (a lot of youthful drinking), and his rough adjustment to the league. His coming-of-age story, on court and off, proves more compelling and individual than the usual-suspects parade of the game's outsized egos.

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THE ART WORLD

PRAGMATIC HEDONISM

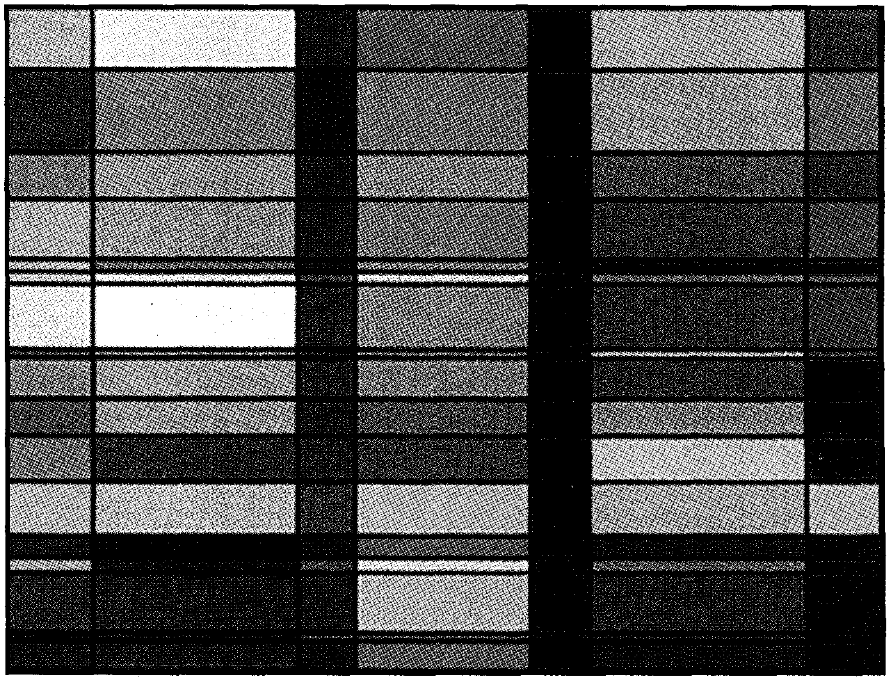
The pleasant surprise of the new, in two big surveys.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

To gauge contemporary art in times that lack intellectual edge and stylistic direction, check the going level of mediocrity: the always teeming range of merit between the pretty good and the not so hot. That stratum is unusually lofty at the moment, as witness the new Whitney Biennial and its sudden rival, an unprecedented, huge group show called "Greater New York" at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center, the Long Island City queen of American alternative spaces and now an affiliate of the Museum of Modern Art. If this sounds like praise so faint that only a dog could hear it, sue me. These are strange days—vibrant with a creative energy that, while short on majesty, is long on optimism. If you can muster a spirit of tolerant interest pitched to the uncertain rewards of what is on offer in new art, you will have fun—and something more, a whiff of cultural trends—in New York right now.

For this Biennial, the first under the leadership of the recently appointed director, Maxwell L. Anderson, the Whitney enlisted a committee of six outside curators to select its complement of ninety-seven American or America-based artists in painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video, and film. (I'm old enough to remember when, in vernacular use, the word "art" meant painting. If you meant sculpture, you said "sculpture." Now art denotes, at minimum, anything on the game farm of any art institution.) For "Greater New York," thirty staffers of P.S. 1 and MOMA considered thousands of mostly young locals—in a field loosely closed to those who achieved prominence before 1995—and settled favor on about a hundred and forty. There are just six overlaps between the two shows: the sculptor Chakaia Booker and the installation artist E. V. Day, the video artists Shirin Neshat and Paul Pfeiffer, the painter Lisa Yuskavage, and the embroidery artist Ghada Amer. The Biennial will run through June 4th, "Greater New York" through May 16th.

Though the P.S. 1 show is inevitably spottier than the surprisingly unexceptionable Biennial, its roundup is more enjoyable, for reasons that bear on American art's present dispensation. It is less starchily official in feeling—closer to the zestful serendipity of artists' studios—at a time when creative sap is running backward from art's public branches to its personal and small-constituency roots. Art today waits upon the idiosyncratic decisions of artists as at no other moment that I can remember. Increasingly, the decisions demonstrate mature, no-big-deal connections with both art history and popular culture. The old distinctions between "high" and "low" haven't blurred; they've evaporated. Ambitious ideas are out. Humble principles are in, notably a professional dedication to pleasing viewers. When not aesthetically exalted—which is most of the time, I'm afraid—new art is reliably entertaining, with an air of knowing what you like better than you do and imparting it with panache. Such pragmatic hedonism registers more keenly in P.S. 1's shaggy ramble than it does, museologically gussied up, at the Whitney, but it is unmistakable at the Whitney, too.



Jeremy Blake's "Angel Dust" (2000), a video piece of cyclical snowfall at P.S. 1: High craftsmanship and humble ambitions mark the new art of today.

COURTESY FEIGEN CONTEMPORARY

This Biennial's overblown aura—as of lyric poems being palmed off as epics—is amusing in itself. It is riotous on the museum's gravely palatial fourth floor, where some essentially intimate stylists must pretend to swagger. They do so amiably, evincing a flexibility among current artists that replaces the avant-gardish truculences of yesteryear. Sarah Sze, an installational sculptor who orchestrates myriad tiny objects with frenetic daintiness, obligingly tricks out an immense space that surrounds the museum's walleyed front window. Ingrid Calame, who derives abstract paintings from found patterns of stains on the streets of Los Angeles, delivers a what-the-hell, vast sheet of transparent Mylar daubed with orange enamel. (It is nonchalantly ravishing.) And twelve laconic little abstractions on raw plywood, by the veteran intimist Richard Tuttle, are hung in a row to generate a misleading but agreeably potent rhythm. The effect of these funny inflations is very 2000, I think: aesthetic trifles occupying a space that dreams of Richard Serra.

For compensatory ballast, the representation of each artist at the Whitney comes with a wordy wall text that is often supererogatory in the extreme, though perhaps savvy about the museum's audience. At one point, a stranger turned to me, pointed at one such label, and said, "Did you read that? It makes sense of this!" I would have thought that "this"—a tidy array of Mexican and Tex-Mex curios by Franco Mondini-Ruiz—made more than enough sense without any help, but I just smiled. Notable in the texts is a hair-trigger eagerness to adduce social and political significance of a kind that was obligatory in the nineteen-nineties but that has become scarce in up-to-date art. These days, whatever ideology manifests itself is mostly vestigial, as when an occasional female artist takes active interest in the fact that she is a woman. You can call this feminism, but it hardly needs to be called anything. In my happy view, what Robert Hughes decried, not so long ago, as the whiny "culture of complaint" is rapidly succumbing to a culture of resolute candor.

Proving this rule at the Whitney is the sore-thumb exception of Hans Haacke's much publicized agitprop installation, a presentation of censorious remarks on art by Rudy Giuliani, among others, in a Gothic typeface and with a soundtrack—marching feet—that evokes Nazism. Haacke has been battered for this piece, which would have passed unremarked in the benchmark, complaint-crazed Biennial of 1993. He has been charged with trivializing the Holocaust, of all obviously unintended things—an instance of unfair attack that, in his case, amounts to poetic justice. Throughout a long career of hothouse radicalism, Haacke has specialized in just such blindsiding smears. It's easy: make a hyperbolic association of something vile to some unsuspecting party and treat it as objective evidence of iniquity. This works when people are in a mood to be fanatically partisan. No such mood exists among today's young artists, who seem more inclined to relish their liberty than to wax hysterical over some politician's posturing hostility.

The locus of artistic freedom now is art itself, which is apparent in all the blooming sophistication about the uses of mediums and genres. Our new artists industriously fit tasks to tools. The most availing mediums are video and painting. Video has come of age after three decades of mostly gimcrack novelty (aside from the lonely mastery of Bruce Nauman). It is an instrument as matter-of-fact as a pencil to artists who have grown up with its capacity to manipulate pictorial experience in architectural space and musical time. Jeremy Blake, at P.S. 1, and Shirin Neshat and Paul Pfeiffer, who are in both shows, stand out. To sounds of roaring wind, Blake's projection of falling snow slowly fills with gridded blocks of changing colors, which then fade to begin the cycle anew. This beautiful piece recalls Harold Rosenberg's classic wisecrack about color-field painting: "apocalyptic wallpaper." Neshat's elegant, two-screen meditations on the culture of the chador in Islamic Iran emit an icy heat of suppressed passions; they are among the first undoubtable masterpieces of video installation. Pfeiffer's silent, tiny projections of basketball action harvested from TV broadcasts—balls tracked in incessant flight, a player caught in a rictus of triumph or agony—rivet the eye and the mind with almost punishing rapture.

While video has risen in artistic prestige, painting has declined, much to its advantage. No longer burdened with the job of symbolizing art as such, the old medium proves indispensable in the skilled hands of artists whose intentions require degrees of nuance that no other visual means can rival. As often as not, these intentions are erotic in character and decadent in drift. Elizabeth Peyton's pretty boys, at P.S. 1, and Lisa Yuskavage's dysfunctional girls, in both shows, seem to me inexcusable except when I am looking at them, whereupon their insinuating eloquence takes my breath away. The same goes for the insolent John Currin, whose three paintings at the Whitney—cruelly satirical contemporary scenes of boys together and girls together, and a Northern Renaissance-style pastiche of two nude women—flirt with greatness as their subtleties of manner and meaning sink in. Among the paintings not to be missed at P.S. 1 are small watercolors of suburban pathos by Tim Gardner, a striking newcomer this season, and a satisfying canvas by the giddily hyped Cecily Brown, whose recent display, at the Gagosian Gallery, of painterly bravura for its own sake was disappointing. Here, Brown's infectious brush kicks up a proper froth around the image of a copulating couple.

Installational art, the putatively cutting-edge mode of the nineties, seems weary all of a sudden—an excessively labor-intensive way to engage viewers. Still, some installations at the Whitney, including an enchantingly feminized old sports car by Kim Dingle, prove worth their trouble. Current sculpture seems in a bad, aimless way, apart from finely chilling works by Robert Gober—wax children's legs protruding from a sink—and such odd tours de force as a gorgeously materialized fiction about Venetian glass design by Josiah McElheny. Both of these artists are in the Biennial. Abstract painting, the fabulous invalid of contemporary art, rests more than comfortably at the Whitney in jewel-like, infinitely sensitive monochromes by Joseph Marioni. This leaves photography, lately a robust medium that, for some reason, is represented so skimpily in both shows that singling any photographer out for praise would slight the legion of the excluded. O.K., there's also computer stuff—mired in its infatuation with effects that will appear primitive in a few years, if not months. You can't hurry art.

These rich, ebullient shows leach most of the pejorative toxins from my over-all verdict of mediocrity. But let the verdict stand, because something crucial to ultimate excellence is missing. The craft and finesse with which our artists now do whatever they set out to do should make us proud to be American. What's absent is depth of a kind that no artist, however gifted and serious, can provide without the encouragement—or the resistance—of society at large. In these boom times, American cultural appetites are at once exacting and permissive. Demanding superb pleasures, we nurture peak performances in popular entertainment, decoration, design, and the middle ranges of the fine arts. Left untouched, as we skim along, are the higher and lower realms—the aspirations and the sufferings of human experience. Our aversion to extremes prohibits the extraordinary. But we can't have everything, and we may well be nostalgic for this steely, insouciant era when it's gone. ♦

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Finalists: Yosef Brody, Roger Carney, Pamela Harris and James Roman (in alphabetical order)

These individuals were selected as having submitted the most creative and entertaining entries relating to an idea for an episode or short story about a Sopranos character. We invite all readers to check out excerpts of these top entries by visiting www.newyorkerreaderlink.com.

Our thanks to all contest participants. Please be sure to watch the season finale of The Sopranos, April 9th, 9PM/8C on HBO.

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THE THEATRE

THE NATURAL

A master takes a lap of honor.

BY JOHN LAHR

On October 10th of this year, the playwright Harold Pinter will turn seventy. To mark both his past and the fact that he still has, so to speak, lead in his pencil, Pinter has directed, at London's Almeida Theatre, in Islington, a terrific evening of his first one-act play, "The Room" (1957), and his latest one-act, "Celebration" (whose title serves as the catchall name of the show). Among the superlative cast assembled for the occasion is an old mate of Pinter's, from his Hackney Downs Grammar School days, the actor and director Henry Woolf—who, thirty-four years ago, suggested to Pinter, then a rep actor going by the name of David Baron, that he submit a play for an evening of one-acts being organized by the Bristol Drama Department. Woolf, who in this production reprises his original role as Mr. Kidd, the vague landlord in the large weird house of Pinter's imagining, directed "The Room" 's début, for four shillings and sixpence, in a converted squash court. Out of that modest and improbable beginning has grown the most influential British theatrical career of the century.

Pinter is an architect of atmospheres. His theatrical project has been to people the sense of panic and impermanence that he sees under everything, to give fear a story. The first speech of his first play contains the sentences "It's very cold out, I can tell you. It's murder"; fully formed from that first beat, a predatory, recalcitrant, chilling world lurks just outside the room. It's our first glimpse of Pinter's fretful, barbarous, often fiercely comic landscape. Inside the room is a familiar lace-curtained bed-sit, with a rocking chair by an electric grate and a kitchen table, at which a taciturn husband mutters the captions of a comic book to himself while his wife hovers around him with his tea. He is Bert (Steven Pacey); she is Rose (the superb Lindsay Duncan, who somehow manages to be both convincing and heartbreaking as the nattering sixty-year-old frump). "Just now I looked out of the window," she says. "It was enough for me." She continues, "There wasn't a soul about. Can you hear the wind?" Although Bert doesn't respond, or speak at all, before leaving for his delivery route, Rose never stops talking and fussing. From the outset, Pinter dramatizes dialogue—or, at least, one large element of language—as a form of silence. "There is no meeting. There is separation," he wrote in his 1949 poem "Kullus." Although Rose cuts and butters Bert's bread, sweetens and pours his tea, the two remain sensationally separate.

The room is Rose's fortress, and over the course of forty-five minutes, as other characters penetrate its boundaries, Pinter contrives to divest Rose, and us, of its comforting sense of solidity. Mr. Kidd knows or does not know the number of rooms in the house; he is or is not telling the truth about his job or his origins. "I think my mum was a Jewess," he says with an authority belied by his grammar. "Yes, I wouldn't be surprised to learn she was a Jewess. She didn't have many babies." The Sands, an edgy couple (the riveting Lia Williams and the powerful Keith Allen), are or are not looking for a flat in the house. Their politeness turns gradually menacing. When Rose tells them that they won't find any vacancies in the house, Mr. Sands replies firmly, "The man in the basement said there was one. One room. Number seven, he said." There's a pause, then Rose answers, "That's this room." Pinter ratchets up the sense of terror and mystery when Rose comes face to face with a large blind black man called Riley (the compelling George Harris), who's been waiting for her in the basement with a message. At first, she berates him, then she listens to what he has to say:

RILEY: Your father wants you to come home. . . .

ROSE: Stop it. What do you want? What do you want?

RILEY: Come home, Sal. . . .

ROSE (*moving in to Riley*): Don't call me that.

RILEY: Come, now.

ROSE: Don't call me that.

RILEY: So now you're here.

ROSE: Not Sal.

RILEY (*touching Rose's hand*): Now I touch you.

So Rose has another history and another home; and, as Riley's tears and the tenderness with which Rose massages his temples imply, the man speaking to her may even be her father. "You and I, the characters which grow on a page, most of the time we're inexpressive, giving little away, unreliable, elusive, evasive, obstructive, unwilling. But it's out of these attributes that a language arises," Pinter said, in 1962. What is astonishing about "The Room" is how audacious and mature Pinter's theatrical language is from the outset. His game

Henry Woolf (left) directed Pinter's first play, for four shillings and sixpence, thirty-four years ago. Photograph by Dudley Reed.

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The New Yorker's celebrated, thought-provoking covers will be featured at the Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, in Rome. To mark the magazine's 75th Anniversary, this exhibition, called "The Talk of the Town," will feature original drawings and paintings that appeared as covers of the magazine from 1990-2000.

This exhibition will feature artists such as Saul Steinberg, Ed Sorel, Art Spiegelman, Michael Roberts, Harry Bliss, Ian Falconer, and Roz Chast. "The Talk of the Town" is part of a larger exhibition called "America Illustrata," that is dedicated to recent North American illustration and visual journalism. This exhibit is produced by La Centrale dell'Arte and the installation is designed by Natalia Indrimi.

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is to place the audience where the author sits: in the uneasy position of not knowing, of having to puzzle out each character's mysterious arrivals and evasions, and live within the sometimes hilarious, sometimes terrifying parameters of the ambiguous.

"The Room" concludes with a resonant and unnerving interplay of unwitting discovery. As Rose touches Riley's face, Bert returns from his delivery route. At first, seeming to pay no attention to her, he talks about the drive home. In this terrific oblique speech, Pinter sexualizes the ordinary—a verbal maneuver that, over the decades, has become one of his calling cards. "She was good," Bert says of his van. "She went with me. She don't mix it with me. I use my hand. Like that. I get hold of her. I go where I go. She took me there. She brought me back. (*Pause*) I got back all right." The violence that for most of the play has seeped in around the edges of Rose's closed world finally erupts inside it. Riley is knocked to the ground and viciously kicked by Bert. Rose clutches her eyes. "Can't see," she says in the play's last line. "I can't see. I can't see." The words are both a symbolic statement of an existential predicament and a kind of epigram to Pinter's subsequent oeuvre, whose stories struggle to trap the unknown and the unspeakable and to show how *Homo sapiens* uses language to spackle over his sense of the void.

In Pinter's plays, words are probes launched into the world, variously, to mask, to mystify, to mock, or to murder. He sets out his entire smorgasbord of gorgeous verbal moves in "Celebration," which, like all good festive occasions, he keeps light and lively.

The play takes place at two banquettes of a chic restaurant. At one table is a sodden, bitter, ravaged foursome of married brothers and sisters marking a thirtieth wedding anniversary: Lambert (Keith Allen), whose boozy contempt and jokey cruelty toward his wife, Julie (Susan Wooldridge), make your hair stand on end ("I've got a loyal wife where?" he says. "I've got one under the table, take my tip. . . . Christ. She's really loyal under the table"); Prue (the rouged, ripe, and bored Lindsay Duncan, showing off a lethal false face to great comic effect); and Matt (Andy de la Tour, with droll basset-hound looks and hangdog attitude). At the other table are Suki (Lia Williams), with a black miniskirt up to her ying-yang, talking dirty to her arrogant husband, Russell (Steven Pacey, who has good innings with the cunning repetitions that betray Russell's insecurity).

Over the decades, Pinter has taught us to understand how badinage hides emptiness. At one point, the unctuous maître d', Richard (Thomas Wheatley), cruises the table of four and asks whether they've been to the theatre. In a few lines of music-hall repartee, Pinter catches the barrenness behind their bowwow bravado:

> MATT: No. The ballet.
> RICHARD: Oh the ballet? What was it?
> LAMBERT: That's a fucking good question.
> MATT: It's unanswerable.
> RICHARD: Good, was it?
> LAMBERT: Unbelievable.
> JULIE: What ballet?
> MATT: None of them could reach the top notes. Could they?

At the finale, after the guests have left, the waiter (the excellent Danny Dyer) stands and surveys the empty tables. Intermittently during the play, he has interrupted each banquette to spin shaggy-dog stories about his grandfather, who he claims was on intimate terms with everyone from T. S. Eliot and Picasso to the Three Stooges. The outrageousness of these tall tales only magnifies the waiter's isolation and desperation. Now, in the silence, the sour solitude that the play's jokes have so far brightly denied suddenly weighs down on the room, and he turns toward us with one final yarn. "My grandfather introduced me to the mystery of life and I'm still in the middle of it. I can't find the door to get out," he says, in a flat, true note of resignation. "My grandfather got right out of it. He left it behind him and he didn't look back. He got that absolutely right." In this perfectly pitched moment of fatigue and fury, the sense of both wanting an end and fearing it coalesces powerfully. "And I'd like to make one further interjection," he adds. He doesn't move, and he doesn't speak. Pinter fades out on the silence and lets the laughter freeze in our throats. The Birthday Boy has got his wish. ♦

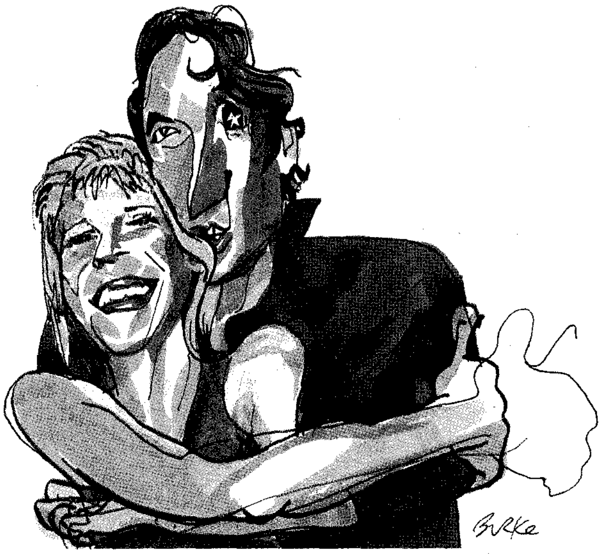
THE CURRENT CINEMA

TURNING THE TABLES

Heartbreak in Chicago and anarchy in the U.K.

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Stephen Frears picture, "High Fidelity," is all about music, although it's really about records, and records are all about love. Our hero is Rob (John Cusack), whose shirts alone deny him any lasting claim to heroism. Rob runs a record store in Chicago called Championship Vinyl, and the name verges on tautology; as far as Rob is concerned, music means LPs and singles—things that you can warp and scar, as if they were feelings, and that you therefore learn to treasure as damaged goods. This is one of the few areas, I suspect, where the raging rock fan and the wrinkle-browed classical nut would agree; for each of them, music began to roll downhill when it became available on a faultless silver roundel the size of a fried egg. A compact disk is like a perfect lover who never wears out, and what's the point of that?



Iben Hjejle and John Cusack in "High Fidelity": Whenever the action threatens to settle into a groove, the needle jumps and skitters to another track.

PHILIP BURKE

Rob started life as an Englishman, the narrator of Nick Hornby's best-selling novel of the same name. The book was stuffed with the desiccated details of English life, which had to get dumped in the move to Chicago; yet the transplant is ominously smooth, suggesting that useless young men worrying about the minutely ripped inner sleeve of their third-favorite Aretha Franklin album are the same wherever you go. If Rob were fixated on TV, or cars, or student politics, the film would have had to remain in North London; but, since music is a lingua franca, the racks at Championship Vinyl stay more or less intact. So do the light-fingered browsers who haunt—though never throng—the store, and Rob's co-workers Dick (Todd Louiso) and Barry (Jack Black), as well as the perfectly harmless soul who wanders in and asks for Stevie Wonder's "I Just Called to Say I Love You," only to have Barry blast him away with a twin-barrelled volley of spite and disbelief.

In their way, the Robs and Barrys of this world, for all their bad hair and cigarette smog, are impossible snobs, worse than anything with a waistcoat in a Merchant Ivory film. Throughout the film, we get their compulsive Top Five listings—their best songs, worst breakups, and other grievous passions—and a corresponding scorn for other tastes. "What really matters is what you like, not what

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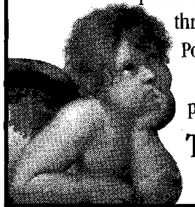

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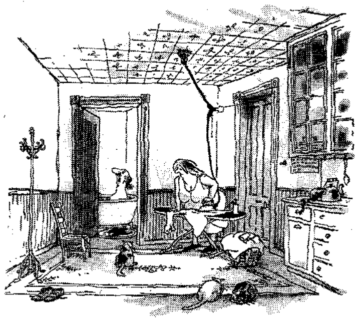

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you're like," declares Rob. Only a boy would say that; it's true as far as it goes, but it goes no farther than the record store, and no girl will stand for it. What Hornby and Frears want to know is: Why do women bother? The question springs like a trap in the opening scene, when Laura (Iben Hjejle), Rob's long-term girlfriend, moves out. To be honest, I was surprised that she had lasted as long as she did; Rob's apartment, with its immaculate ranks of album spines and its all too maculate strewing of everything else, makes his strip-lit workplace look like the Frick, and it bears depressingly few traces of her brighter, less obsessive temperament. Laura is a lawyer by trade, but if she ever tried to argue the case for new wallpaper, she lost. "Why am I not happy?" Rob asks. "Because you're the same person you used to be," says Laura, nailing an entire gender in nine words.

Frears and his production designer, Therese DePrez, seem to have forced the issue here. The apartment is painted in dark, muddy-metal tones, and outside the skies cloud over in sympathy. Of the city's wind there is little sign; I know that the humor of "High Fidelity" is shrugging and shrewd—allergic to any contentment longer than "Let's Get It On," by Marvin Gaye—but did it really have to be backed by such Biblical broadsides of rain? Poor Cusack stomps through most of the film with his jacket over his head; true, he gets to have sex in a car, but only after vaulting a picket fence and lying down in a flower bed during a storm. I guess that's the moral: art is Gaye, but life is a tape loop of Michael Bolton songs, and it will finally wear you down. When happiness does arrive in this movie, it has the air not of something that you reach, like your top speed, but of something that you give in to, like baldness or old age. As Laura, Hjejle has a reticence that borders on the blank, as if she were pre-resigned, or as if both Rob and his creators were unsure how to treat the one woman who refuses to be filtered through desire—who is more real than they can handle. "I'm too tired not to be with you," she says. A while later, Rob says, "I'm tired of the fantasy. It never really delivers." Not only ain't there no mountain high enough; there ain't no mountain.

These sane, unromantic truths may be too chewy for some moviegoers, so it's lucky that "High Fidelity" is generous with its laughs. There are neat cameos by Tim Robbins, complete with blue-tinted spectacles and a weakness for the sitar, and Catherine Zeta-Jones, who, with her clicking fingers and swaying hips, proves she knows that self-conscious sexiness can be annoying. (This makes her sexier still, of course, which is *really* annoying.) Then, there's John Cusack, whose pale-faced deadpan has turned him into a kind of slacker Harry Langdon. I had been warned that he keeps turning to address the camera, and I braced myself for the worst, but he brings it off; for one thing, he delivers reams of uncut Hornby, which is always a kick, and, for another, he employs the famous Cusack Sentence-Jumbler (patented by John and his sister Joan, who also appears in the film), which causes dialogue to hurry where it should pause, and vice versa. The announcement "My all-time favorite book is Johnny Cash's autobiography, 'Cash,' by Johnny Cash" is already crammed enough to be funny, but try saying it with the words streaming together and a look of ecclesiastical gravity on your face.

Hornby's last novel was called "About a Boy," a title that would fit his collected works. The first word matters as much as the last; his prose does not press forward but revolves like an LP, turning around and about its subject. This is tricky for the cinema, which tends to panic at any loss of momentum, but Frears, who proved with "The Snapper" just how vivid and spiky the small, stay-at-home movie can be, has pretty well cracked the problem; he adjusts the counterweight, as it were, so that whenever the action threatens to settle into a groove, the needle jumps and skitters to another track. I would have chopped down one or two of Rob's mopey talks with Laura, but the rest of "High Fidelity" has fun going nowhere in particular; in short, it's more like a dance than

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a book. We get flashbacks, we get stumbles and trips, we get three separate stabs at a single scene, and, strangest of all, we get someone singing an old Peter Frampton number and making it sound beautiful. Frampton Comes Alive! It's amazing what they can do in the movies these days.

To make one documentary about the Sex Pistols may be regarded as youthful indiscretion. To make two is asking for trouble. Nonetheless, Julien Temple, who made "The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle," in 1979, has returned to the scene of the crime. "The Filth and the Fury" is one more trawl through the teeming trash cans of little Johnny Rotten and his friends. You will be relieved to learn that they have lost none of their capacity to be foul, mostly to one another; their capacity to shock, on the other hand, now looks like a touching period detail, and even that is dented by the revelation that the late Sid Vicious was named after a pet hamster. This highly principled rodent bit him one day "when he was trying to be sweet to it." I was still staggering under this news when Temple switched to footage of a benefit concert, at which the band larks around with children and admires a cake that has the words "Sex Pistols" inscribed on it in pink icing. So much for the collapse of Western culture.

The film is a mess, deliberately so; the torn raucousness of Temple's montage—intercut with clips of Olivier's "Richard III," a template for potent deformity—is designed to summon the spirit of anarchy in the U.K. This is bracing to watch, but as history it feels rigged, and far less convincing than the backdrop of "High Fidelity." Hornby and Frears know that we clutch at songs out of boredom, or out of longings that beg for articulation; to judge by Temple's opening salvo of riots and police cordons, the Sex Pistols were purely a product of political wrath, yet one of them meekly confesses that he was unable to name the Prime Minister of the time. The most provoking line comes from Johnny Rotten: "You don't write 'God Save the Queen' because you hate the English race. You write a song like that because you love them, and you're fed up with them being mistreated." Shades of Mrs. Thatcher, I think, who came to power in 1979. Brave is the hamster that would bite her. ♦

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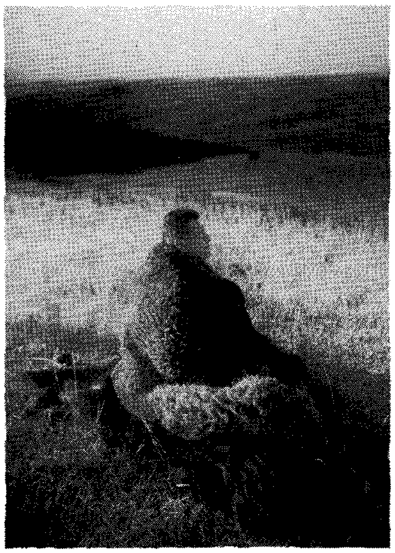

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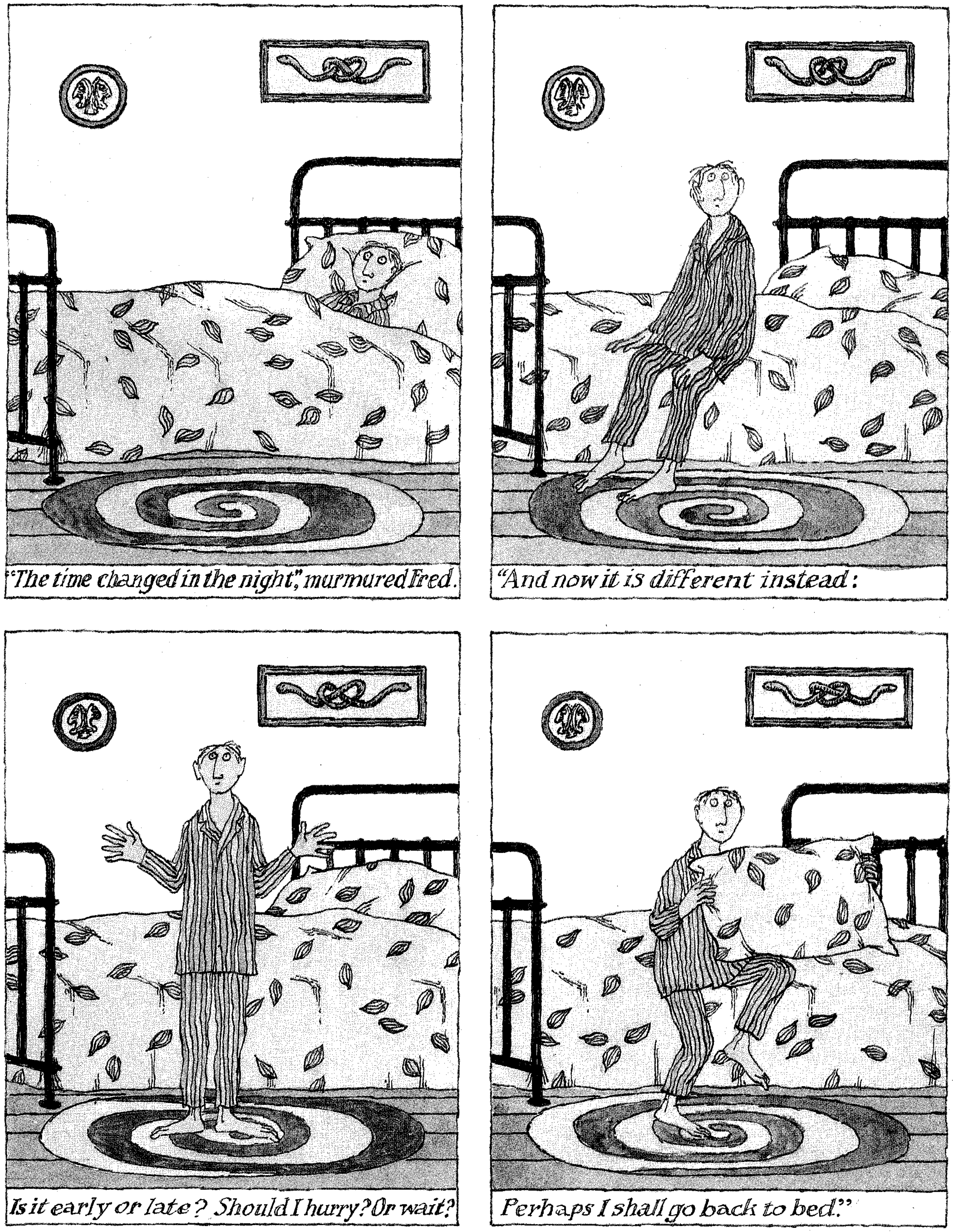

"The time changed in the night," murmured Fred.

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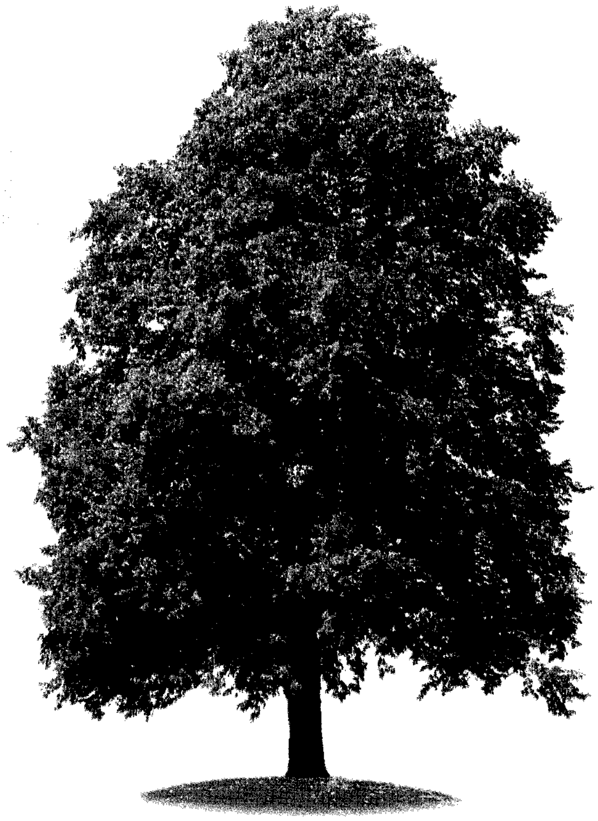

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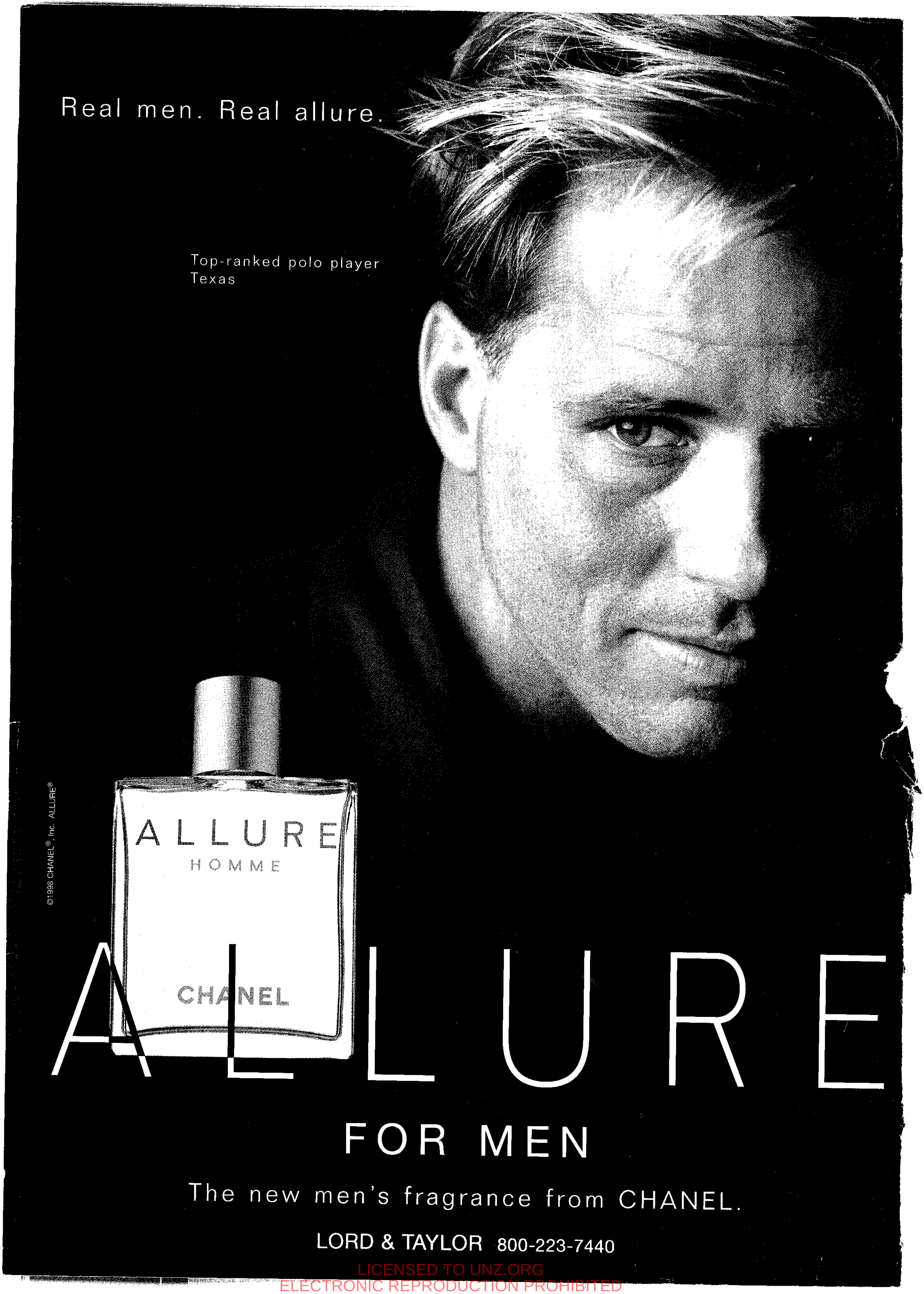
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